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ARGOSY

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STORIES BY

KAY BOYLE

PAUL GALLICO

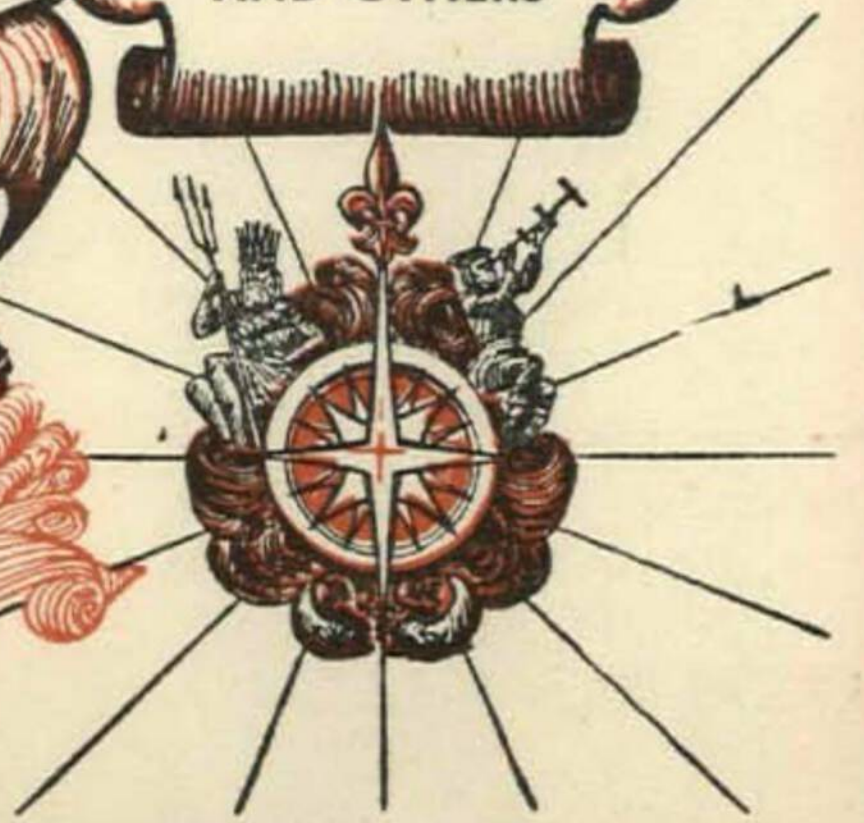
NIGEL BALCHIN

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

RAY BRADBURY

JOHN DICKSON CARR

AND OTHERS



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ARGOSY

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To Puffin, a White Cat

ON the dark blue rug there is a midnight sky
The creamy saucer fills its heaven like a moon,
And over it a cat's white face
Basks in a muted ecstasy,
Lapping the milky way to paradise
With near-shut golden eyes, pearled beard and rosy mouth,
A cosy mask, lit by contentment from within
And by reflected radiance from beneath;
Where, like true benevolence, eclipsing its material cause,
The saucer, empty, still illuminates,
While Puffin sits and contemplates
Infinity's great O, the starry silk
Of dreams that only can be patched with milk.

Until the want is satisfied, for joy he softly roars,
And kneads his milky firmament with omnipresent paws.

JAMES KIRKUP

ROAD TO KARBALA

The shadows of the palms slanted out purple against the sand

by CHRISTOPHER LANDON

THE frontier post shimmered and heaved in the high noon of late-summer heat. It was surrounded and pressed in by the rows of humping foothills that looked like a frozen yellow sea. There was nothing else but the black ribbon of the road that wound between them, one way into Persia, the other to Iraq.

There was little of the post itself: the stone bungalow of the police-house, set back from the road barrier on a low mound, the hovels behind it and the peeling dome of a mosque that passed for a village, and the scattered, ragged palms. The dry leaves whispered and rattled as the puffs of hot air caught them. In the shade of the sentry-box by the barrier, a beggar crouched, looking like a fallen scarecrow, too apathetic to brush the flies from his eyes. Everything smelt of heat and corruption.

The police-car came from the west, out of Iraq, with its trailing plume of dust behind it. The driver turned off the road in front of the police-house.

Inspector Hakim got out of the back seat and walked down to the barrier. He threw a coin to the beggar and then addressed himself to the Captain of the post. " Is all well? " he inquired.

The Captain saluted. " All well, sir. Save for the impatience of some of these Persian rogues." He glanced down the line of lorries awaiting entry. At the fourth, an argument was raging.

" What ails them? "

" They are angry at the delay in the examination. They say their business entitles them to go through before the others."

" And you say? "

" That they wait their turn with the rest."

" Which is right. But what makes them wish to hurry in the heat of the day? "

" They carry the bones of the Faithful to Karbala, Inspector."

Hakim's eyelids drooped into slits. " The bones of the Faithful going to be buried in holy ground. They must be good men, these Persians." He turned on the Captain suddenly. " Have you seen the bones? "

The Captain shuffled his feet in the sand. " I did not like—"

" No, I understand. But it is the duty of someone to see." He looked towards the mosque. " Who better than the Mullah? Send him my respects and ask him to take tea with me at the post. When he has seen the bones, they can pass. Until then, they can rest in the shade and acquire virtue. Bring me their papers and let the others go through."

The Mullah came, and the papers were brought. Inspector Hakim thumbed through them as he sat on the carpet of the police-post verandah.

Down on the road there was only one lorry now, pulled onto the sand under the palms. A policeman with slung rifle leaned against the cab. The three Persians crouched a few yards off in the shade.

Hakim looked down at them, long and carefully. Then he turned to the Mullah, who was sipping tea beside him.

" Those holy Persians—what do you think of them? "

The Mullah considered. " They have not the holiness they profess—but there is something else . . ."

" Yes. They cannot keep still. They seem afflicted by all the torments of hell. Look—"

Below them, the ground shimmered. A little whirlwind caught the sand and scraps at the side of the road and tossed them up in the air in a yellow spiral; everywhere the flies buzzed. By the sentry-box the beggar crouched so still that there seemed no life in him. In the shade, one of the Persians got to his feet and took a few steps towards the truck. Then he sat down again, scratching.

" They are nervous," said Inspector Hakim. He threw the papers to one side. " These are in order. And the bones? "

" They are there," said the Mullah, " and nothing else—that I could see. I looked with care."

Hakim sighed. " Then we must let them pass. But I do not like to see them idle while waiting. On such a journey, they should be spending their time in prayer."

He laid a hand on the old man's arm. " Before they leave, will you take them to the mosque and read from the Book? It is your duty."

The Mullah smiled in his beard. " What is behind this, serpent? "

" Nothing, nothing—if you will keep them out of my sight for half an hour. It is agreed? Good, I shall call the guard."

The Persians, in their high *pahlevi* hats, stood in a ring before him, as they scuffled the ground and stared at their feet.

" All is in order," said Hakim. " You may depart in peace—" There was a stir among the group—" After," he added softly, " you have made your peace with God. The holy man will take

you to the mosque and read from the Book. Then say your prayers and go.

" Do not fear for your lorry," he shouted after them as they moved down the slope. " I, Inspector Hakim, shall guard it."

He was a long time in the back of the truck. Once, he came to the back of the canopy and held something long and white up to the light. When he jumped down at last, he was carrying a parcel that looked like a bundle of sticks, covered with a cloth. He walked up the slope to the police-post. He put the bundle out of sight in one corner of the verandah and then sat waiting.

The Mullah and the Persians returned. Hakim made no comment when he gave them their papers, and watched in silence as the old Chevrolet groaned into life and then bumped and swayed out of sight down the road to the west. He waited until the black speck had vanished in a dip in the hills and the noise of the motor dwindled to nothing. Then he went down the slope to have conversation with the Captain at the barrier.

It was cooler now. The shadows of the palms slanted out farther, purple against the sand. Hakim came back and sat down by the Mullah, reaching for another cup of tea.

He said suddenly, " It is written in the Book—in the Sura of the prophets: ' Man is made up of haste.' ".

The Mullah nodded, then finished the verse: " ' I will show you my signs; desire them not then to hasten Me.' "

" Those Persians," said Hakim, " were made up of haste—and made *in* haste. Look, I shall show you."

He got up and collected his bundle, spreading out the cloth on the carpet in front of them. There were two human thigh-bones, long, thin, the colour of old ivory.

The Mullah started. " But it is sacrilege—"

" To disturb the bones going to Karbala. But they were not going to Karbala."

He laid them side by side, the knee-joints towards him, the knobs of the thigh-joint turned inwards. He looked up for a moment when he heard the motor start down by the barrier, smiled as the police truck, driven by the Captain with two guards in the back, moved off fast towards the east. Then he continued his arrangement.

" There," he said. " Is not that how they lie in the body? "

The Mullah nodded.

" These Persians," mused Hakim, " made in haste—and wrongly made." He pointed to the knee-joints. " If this is their form, then by the shape of those joints, their legs must hinge forwards and they must walk backwards."

Then he turned the bones over so that the hinge of the knee-joint was behind. Now the heads of the thighs were turned towards the outside.

" If they walk as other men, then their thighs must spring from outside their bodies. No."

He got up and took one of the bones over to a pillar of the verandah. There was a dry, brittle crack as he hit it against the stone, and the head of the bone came away in one clean break.

Hakim squinted into the dark round cavity where the marrow had been. Then he turned the bone upside-down and shook it. Four thin lead tubes fell out onto the carpet with soft thuds. He picked one up and smelt it. " Opium," he said.

The Mullah was leaning forward, staring. " They will burn in hell. But you have let them escape—"

" No. Their discomfort will start very soon. The Captain is after them now and there is only one road. It was better to take them a little farther from the frontier—with less chance of escape to where we cannot follow."

He was smiling as he slipped the tubes of drug back into their container. " Made up in haste, wrongly made—and fools as well," he said. " They glued the top of some of the bones back the wrong way round."

★ ★ ★

WISTOW

The lazy lanes of Wistow,
They wander without care
And lead with many a twist, oh
From nowhere to anywhere.

The folk who live in Wistow
Do so without surprise.
Andante, never presto,
Goes time across their eyes.

They follow no Mephisto
To opulent delights
For there's nothing wrong with Wistow
On romantic summer nights.

Then the air's a kiss to Wistow,
That grows like a crooked rose.
And it were wickedness to wish to
Remember this in prose.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

THE COUNTY WENCH

**Sophy was a charmer—
and quite unscrupulous**

by NIGEL BALCHIN

MY Uncle Charles paused before the portrait of the very small woman with the very large dog, and looked at it for some while in silence. " I didn't know you had that," he said at last.

" Neither did I," I said. " It turned up when we were clearing the loft. Rather nice, I thought."

" Yes. You know who it is, of course? "

" Some vague relative? "

My Uncle Charles smiled. " Not so very vague, if you had known her. It is my Aunt—your Great-Aunt Sophy. Better known, perhaps, as the County Wench."

" She looks very pretty."

" She was prettier than that. I can just remember her. I was only about six when she died, which is hardly the age at which one appreciates pretty women. But even so, I noticed how much prettier than anybody else Aunt Sophy was."

" If the proportions are right, she must have been an uncommonly small woman, or else that's an uncommonly large dog."

" Aunt Sophy was just about five feet in height. The dog is a mastiff." My Uncle Charles reflected. " It's rather a pity that the painter did not include her husband, Uncle Peter, instead of the dog. They were not unlike in appearance and Uncle Peter was an even bigger specimen. I remember him as at least eight feet high. I believe he was, in fact, six feet four."

" They must have been an odd pair," I said, leading the way into the drawing-room.

My Uncle Charles settled himself firmly into my favourite chair. " They were," he said. " Uncle Peter had a habit of picking her up and putting her where he wanted her to be, which sometimes disconcerted people who didn't know them well." He smiled. " She, for her part, used to put *him* where she wanted him without bothering to pick him up."

It was a lovely spring evening, and the garden was looking its best. The dinner had been rather good. A spring of peaceful affection for everything and everybody gushed in my heart, and overflowed to include even my Uncle Charles.

"Why," I said recklessly, "was she called the County Wench?"

"I have never known," said my Uncle Charles, "whether the family to which we both belong is one of which we should be mildly proud or mildly ashamed. Your Father, of course, was very proud of it. But then the mere fact that he belonged to any family would have given it a peculiar sanctity to him."

"I gather it's been going on for a long time."

"It has. One of your ancestors was killed at Bosworth fighting for King Richard III. Indeed, he seems to have been about the only person who *did* fight for King Richard III on that occasion. But that is rather my point. The family has been about for at least five hundred years, which is usually a matter of pride. But during that five hundred years it has never, as far as I know, produced anybody of the least distinction. No statesman, no artist, not even a notorious rake.

"A bad General and an indifferent Admiral, neither of whom ever held an important command, make up the total of its fame. In war, it was usually to be found fighting in a minor capacity, usually on the wrong side. At the Reformation, it became unenthusiastically Protestant without even making any money out of it. In politics it was at one time mildly Whig and later became dully Conservative. Socially and financially, it has varied between mild middle-class prosperity and downright poverty.

"Not much of a record for five hundred years. Perhaps it is because, in the whole of that time, none of your ancestors ever married an Irishwoman, a Scotswoman, a Welshwoman, or a Jewess, or anybody to bring the blood of another race to blend with their solid Englishness."

Your Great-Uncle Peter, of whom I was speaking a moment ago, was a typical member of the family. Like a good many of his ancestors he was a farmer, and he lived at Rayburn Keep in Surrey, which had been in the family for many generations. It was advertised for sale the other day, I noticed, and stated to be one of the smaller show places of Surrey, eminently suitable for City Man. The price, I think, was £25,000 for the house and five acres.

But in Uncle Peter's day Rayburn Keep was still a farmhouse, with six hundred acres of land—this being one of the periods of mild prosperity.

Uncle Peter himself, as I have said, was a very big, powerful man, rather handsome in a massive way; of reasonable but not excessive intelligence, and, I believe, a very good farmer—particularly as a cattle-breeder.

Until the age of about thirty-five, he remained a bachelor (which, as you know, is unusual in our family) and an unmarried sister kept-house for him. Then he fell in love, suddenly but very completely, with Miss Sophy Channing, whose portrait you found in the loft.

Merely looking at the portrait, one can see plenty of reasons why Uncle Peter fell in love with Sophy. Practically every young man in Surrey had done so already. Moreover, she was not merely a pretty girl, but a charming and accomplished one. She was gay, intelligent, an excellent musician, a good dancer, fluent in three languages, and heaven knows what else. And she was the daughter of Sir Esmond Channing, Baronet, who was, or perhaps had been Sheriff of Surrey.

One can therefore see Uncle Peter's point of view. What is less easy to see is hers in falling in love with him. She was only twenty, she had been brought up as a rich man's daughter, and she loved social life. She might easily have made a brilliant match—and I would remind you that in those days making a brilliant match was held up to young women as their highest duty and ambition.

Instead, she quarrelled with her family, and cut herself off from most of her friends and out of her father's will, in order to marry a huge bulk of thirty-five-year-old, not too bright farmer. The ways of women are very strange.

If Sophy's family was angry, so, in a way, was Uncle Peter's. It felt that she was a most unsuitable wife and would be of little use to him, and in its proud yeoman-farmer way it resented the fuss made by the Channings. In these days of democracy, when one man is as good as another or even better, we forget that the class distinctions of a hundred years ago were often as fiercely upheld by the lower group as by the upper. Uncle Peter was regarded as having tarnished the family pride by wishing to marry above his station.

Nevertheless, they married, and Aunt Sophy came to be the mistress of Rayburn Keep. It was, I think, the unmarried sister whom she displaced who christened her the County Wench, and as such she was usually referred to by the family, even later when, in a grudging way, they grew fond of her.

And they did grow fond of her, and so did everybody about the farm. Years later when I knew her she was still utterly charming. As a girl, she must have been irresistible. I think the point was that she was sincerely interested by absolutely everything, and always found it amusing. There was nothing that could happen to Aunt Sophy, however seemingly unlucky or difficult, which she did not see as funny.

My chief recollection of her was that when I visited the farm at the age of six, she and I became involved in a conspiracy whereby I was allowed to strike matches—a thing I greatly enjoyed, but was never allowed to do at home.

(My Uncle Charles paused and frowned.) 'I realize that I am making her sound like one of those child-women out of Barrie at his worst.

I can only say that she wasn't like that at all, being far too quick-witted and sharp-tongued, and having far too much of the devil in her, to be anybody's fairy princess. Sophy was no child, though she certainly could be uncommonly childish in the worst, careless, irresponsible, feather-headed sense.

The people on the farm liked her because she was young and pretty, and because she was clever enough to see how to make them do so. She knew she was a charmer, and she used it quite unscrupulously. Moreover, despite her upbringing, she was a born democrat, and she used to scandalize Uncle Peter by bringing her maids into the drawing-room to have tea with her if she wanted somebody to talk to—and this in 1870.

I suppose, when they married, Uncle Peter must have been very much in love with her, and she with him. But I doubt if he had ever realized quite what he had taken on. I think he probably thought he *had* married the Barrie child-woman or David Copperfield's Dora. It was the sort of thing a great ox of a man like that would think, and I don't doubt Sophy played the part beautifully when it suited her.

He was very good and kind and generous and indulgent to her, and never expected her to show the slightest competence in any practical matter. But what he never seems to have realized is that being somebody's pretty doll can be an uncommonly dull job when your owner just leaves you alone in the nursery.

I always find it mildly irritating when the worst sort of dull, conventional judgment is justified by events. When Uncle Peter married Sophy, the general view was that once the novelty had worn off, Sophy would soon get tired of being a farmer's wife, and that then Uncle Peter would be in trouble. In this the general view was right. She did, and he was.

To a great extent it was his own fault. He was a hard-working man with little time to spare to be with her, and since he was convinced that she was purely decorative, and never gave her any work to do, or encouraged her to take an interest in his own affairs, and since they had no children, she had nothing to do but get into mischief.

By the time they had been married for three years, she was getting into it with enthusiasm.

As a married man, you will know that the first, or elementary grade of getting into mischief for ladies is to spend too much money. My Aunt Sophy qualified for this grade without any difficulty.

She had been brought up as a rich man's daughter, with no idea of the value of money; she liked pretty and expensive things; and she had a husband who was generous and liked to spoil her. Indeed, at first I believe Uncle Peter positively used to encourage her extravagance.

I suppose the poor devil realized dimly that she was not happy, and hoped, as many a man has hoped before and since, that everything could be put right by working still harder, neglecting her still more, and giving her more than ever to spend. Anyhow, during this period Sophy certainly spent far more than Uncle Peter could afford.

Rayburn Keep was a big sixteenth-century farmhouse in which it was still customary for the farm-hands, the servants, and the family all to eat their meals together in the big hall; and my Father could remember plenty of times, during this period of lavish entertaining, when thirty-five people sat down to a meal there. My Uncle was a first-rate shot and horseman, and many of those parties were sporting parties for his benefit rather than Sophy's own. But this did not make them cost any less.

My Uncle Peter, as I have said, was a reasonably prosperous farmer and he was making a good deal of money out of his stock-breeding. But it would have needed an income of an entirely different order to deal with Aunt Sophy's extravagance, and he soon began to realize that it could not go on.

At first he protested mildly. Aunt Sophy took no notice. Then he began to be really alarmed. Aunt Sophy charmed and wheedled him out of his fears and gave bigger parties than ever. Finally, when it was nearly too late, he became angry and put his foot down, whereupon she contrived to be at once sweetly apologetic, to leave him feeling that he was being mean and unjust, and to go on being extravagant.

You will observe that her technique in these matters had nothing original in it. She was just very good at a very old game.

My Father maintained that sometimes, when she was particularly outrageous, Uncle Peter would lose his temper and beat her, and that this was the most fatally useless and expensive thing he could do. For, being a big, soft-hearted, sentimental man who loved her very much, he never beat her hard enough to be any good, and then spent the next fortnight in an agony of remorse, during which Sophy had her own way completely.

Certainly, if you look at her portrait outside, which was painted

at about that time, she doesn't look as though her spirit was being broken by brutal treatment; whilst one of my Uncle, at about the same period, shows a worried, puzzled, rather bewildered face —the face of a man who had bitten off more than he could chew.

However, Uncle Peter could, and did, put an end to the lavish entertaining at Rayburn Keep, and reduced his housekeeping costs to a more possible level. But since he still did nothing to keep Sophy employed or amused, the only result was to reduce her again to boredom and discontent; and within six months she had passed into the second, or intermediate grade of getting into mischief, which was simply to spend as much time as possible away from home.

Rayburn Keep is only thirty odd miles from London, and even in those days it was no great journey.

My Aunt found more and more reasons for making the journey, to shop and to visit friends; and often she would be away for several days at a time.

As usual, Uncle Peter was half responsible. He was anxious, as ever, that she should enjoy herself and be happy, and he insisted that there was no reason to hurry back to him if she wished to stay in Town.

He would be quite happy alone and there were plenty of people to look after him. He went on saying this so firmly and so often that in the end, a less acute woman than Sophy might have been pardoned for thinking that he really didn't care whether she was there or not.

Of course, it was completely untrue. He was utterly lonely and miserable without her. After about six months of it, not being a very original man, he began to drink more than was good for him, and altogether the household at this time does not present a very pretty picture.

It is the one thing that I have always found it difficult to forgive my Aunt, that she either did not see or did not care how wretched he was. Whatever his faults, he had always been devoted to her. Yet she let things go so far that my Father was genuinely afraid that Uncle Peter might shoot himself.

Quite apart from being miserably lonely, he was still worried about money, for what Sophy had ceased to spend on lavish housekeeping, she now spent on these expeditions to London. The bills were no smaller; they merely came from different places.

How long things could or would have gone on like this, I don't know. But, mercifully, my Aunt, always a wholehearted person, passed into the third, or advanced grade of female mischief, and that brought matters to a head. She began a more or less serious

affair with Lord Grinton, who was about her own age, good-looking in a rather foolish way, heir to a huge fortune, and a well-known amateur jockey. He seems to have had no other qualities whatever except vague good nature.

I have called it "a more or less serious affair," because I don't think anybody ever knew quite how far it went. But Sophy certainly went about with Grinton enough to cause something of a scandal; and Uncle Peter, sitting in his farmhouse, was almost the last man to hear about it.

Our family, as you know, has a passionate tradition of privacy and not interfering in one another's affairs; and though Peter's brothers and sisters had been angry as they watched the County Wench get him into trouble and make him miserable, no word had ever been spoken to him about it. But Sophy's affair with Grinton was too much, and it was decided that someone must speak to Peter.

A family conclave appointed my Father to do the speaking, and the old man's account of the incident, many years later, always gave me great pleasure. It was so very characteristic. My Father went to Rayburn Keep and saw Peter. He was there two hours. They were both farmers and for practically the whole time they talked farm matters. Just as my Father was leaving he said: "By the way, Peter—I'd keep an eye on Sophy."

Uncle Peter said, "She's never here to keep an eye on."

"That's what I mean," said my Father. "Lord G."

"Really?" said Uncle Peter.

"It's all about," said my Father. "Not my business, but I thought you'd better know."

"Thank you," said Uncle Peter—and on that they parted. I should think that was the most intimate conversation either of them ever had with another member of the family.

If the same thing happened nowadays, I suppose my Uncle Peter would either have employed detectives to watch Sophy, and subsequently have divorced her, or else would have shrugged his shoulders and sought consolation somewhere else. But this was in about 1870, and he was a simple man. He just went straight to London to look for her.

Exactly what happened is doubtful, but the traditional story is that he found her at Grinton's apartment, playing the piano and singing, while Grinton sat and smoked a cigar and listened. One can imagine more dramatic scenes of guilt. Sophy must have been a little startled, but she was a cool hand. She simply greeted her husband enthusiastically and introduced him to Grinton.

Uncle Peter bowed to Grinton and said to Sophy, "I think you'd better come home."

Sophy opened her eyes very wide and said, "But why, Peter?" very innocently.

Uncle Peter said, "We won't go into it now, but I think you had. Where's your coat?"

Sophy then started to protest and wheedle in her usual way, half pretending to be angry and half teasing him. He couldn't be so rude as to come and tear her away like that. Why did he always have to be such a bear? Why couldn't he sit down and be pleasant? Etcetera, etcetera.

My Uncle Peter was always helpless at this performance, and he just stood there, probably looking very awkward, and saying nothing. She might even have got away with it, if young Grinton hadn't chimed in with more of the same thing. I dare say the silly young man saw Uncle Peter as a mere clod-hopper whom anybody could lead by the nose.

But being gilly-gillied by Sophy was one thing, and being teased by a young ass was quite another. My Uncle Peter was a man with a proper respect for the aristocracy, so he merely picked up Lord Grinton, who was a small man, and placed him carefully on top of the grand piano. He then picked up his wife and came away.

(My Uncle Charles paused and smiled thoughtfully out at the garden.)

Nobody knows exactly what Aunt Sophy felt about this performance. But, knowing something of women, we can make a guess. To be picked up and carried bodily away from one's lover by a very large husband must have been about as titillating to female vanity as one can imagine.

But I fancy, in view of what happened afterwards, that there must have been more than this to it, and that something more than vanity was touched. Because from that day till the end of her life, which came only a few years later, she remained utterly devoted to Peter.

It was not that she was frightened or that he had broken her spirit. She continued to tease him and twist him round her little finger to the end. But she simply turned all that tremendous energy and interest and vitality onto him instead of away from him.

It was during this time that I knew her, and even a child could see that she was the life and soul not only of the household but of the farm. Not that she really ever learnt much about it. But she encouraged him, and let him talk to her, and generally made him feel that it was all very important to her, too.

As indeed it seems to have been, in the light of the end of this story. I have told you that Rayburn Keep was an old house and it had about it one ancient peculiarity.

There was a heriot on it. I don't know if heriots exist any longer, but they were a sort of ancient tax or death-duty on farmers, by which, whenever anybody died in the house, the exciseman was entitled to come and seize one beast, of his own choosing, from the farm.

About five or six years after he had placed Lord Grinton on the grand piano, Uncle Peter had occasion to go away from home. I think he had gone to a cattle fair, and he was away for several days. It was a very hard winter and extremely cold, and while he was away, my Aunt Sophy fell ill. Exactly how or why I have never quite known, but from the story as my Father told it I think it must have been acute pneumonia.

Anyhow, the first my Father heard of it was when a message arrived one afternoon to say that Aunt Sophy was desperately ill, and to ask him to come at once. They had sent for Uncle Peter, but he was a long way away, while my Father's farm was only thirty miles from Rayburn Keep. My Father saddled his horse and rode hard, but by the time he arrived, it was dark.

As he rode up, he saw lanterns and a group of people on the lawn outside the house. It was a bitterly cold night, and the grass was white and crisp. A mattress had been placed on it, and on the mattress, covered by a mass of blankets, lay Aunt Sophy. There were hurricane lanterns at each corner of the mattress, and round it were grouped the servants and half a dozen of the farm-hands.

My Father did not understand at first, and he pushed his way through the group and said, "My God, Sophy, what's happening? Is everybody mad?"

She was only half conscious, but she smiled at him and moved her eyes to something, and my Father, following them, saw that, walking up and down in the shadows, slightly away from the group, was Peterson, the exciseman.

The servants told him what had happened. She had felt from the beginning of her illness that she was going to die, and her one worry was that, if she did, Peterson would take Uncle Peter's prize bull, which was his pride and joy, and the foundation of his stock-breeding operations. And so she had decided that she must not die in the house, but outside it.

Heaven knows how much charm and strength she must have used on the servants before she could make them carry her down to the lawn, but in the end, when she was obviously sinking, they had done it. She had been there for over an hour, saying nothing,

but occasionally turning her eyes towards Peterson with that sly little smile.

She never spoke again. Soon after my Father arrived, she lost consciousness, and when, about midnight, Uncle Peter arrived, having ridden over eighty miles at full speed, there was nothing left for him to do but to pick up for the last time what was left of the County Wench, and carry it into the house.

★ ★ ★

LET'S GO!

By sea and air and land, now's the time to set off! No currency problems or passport difficulties involved in these excursions.
All aboard for the holiday season! We don't ask if the journey's really necessary, but you score one point each for guessing the destination, the author, and the source, making a total of twenty-four.

The answers are on page 65.

1. *If you do like to be beside the seaside, here's a gay bathing-place —and a whole campful of soldiers, with every possibility of earthly happiness for one's silly young sister.*
2. *Something out of the way for the brave and the curious? Camels will start from the Gate of the Sun at evening for this golden journey. Lead on, O Master of the Caravan!*
3. *All that way in forty minutes—it's like something from a dream, but then, we're travelling swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.*
4. *This voyage took longer—twenty years or more—but there were fascinating souvenirs like the Monkey with lollipop paws, and a feast of dumplings at the end.*
5. *This is where you'll arise and go when you hear lake water lapping on the pavements gray.*
6. *Down, down, down—with No One in charge of the Nautilus.*
7. *If you prefer peace and holy quiet, where the branches stir across the moon, you will pack and take a train to this village.*
8. *Why, here's a sweet spot, with bathing and climbing. Makes one forget one's timber leg, yo ho!*

You must not miss the gripping new story
by JACK SCHAEFER
author of "SHANE"
IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

HEADING FOR TROUBLE

Through scudding wisps of cloud he saw orange lights

by DAVID BEATY

AN hour out from Panama, on the way home, the Jamaica weather suddenly started to go sour. Captain Leeming looked out of Easy Uncle's cockpit windows, and saw mare's-tail cirrus high in the darkening sky above them, followed later by a thick white coating of cirro-stratus.

The weather forecast he had received before leaving had given a trace of cloud and twenty miles' visibility at Kingston. Now the amended forecast lay on the steel throttle pedestal between the First Officer, Cockcroft, and himself: continuous rain, 600-feet cloud base, visibility two miles, wind—south, thirty knots, gusting fifty.

It was a weather situation he particularly hated.

It was above Company limits, which meant he would have to try to land. There were ten passengers for Jamaica. But the only let-down he could do was on a radio beacon, affected by the mountains and probably by the static in the clouds, four miles from the aerodrome and nowhere near the line for landing. And the wind was well off the direction of the runway, blowing towards the steep mountains that lined the harbour.

While he was thinking about the inadequate let-down procedure, Easy Uncle nosed into cloud and heavy rain. A blinding flash of lightning lit up the shivering wet wing.

Cockcroft said, " Reminds me of the time I hit a thunderstorm over Blackpool. I had to . . ."

But Leeming took no notice of him and he lapsed into silence.

Approaching the island, the pilot let down to 11,000 feet, still well above the height of the mountains. He could hear the call-sign of the beacon on the radio compass. The needle wavered, and gradually steadied, pointing dead ahead. Then it wheeled right over and pointed behind him.

" Tell 'em we're over the beacon," he called to Cockcroft, " I'll let down to the south. Over the sea."

As carefully as he could, in the bumping, blind cloud, he turned back on the beacon. When once more he was over it, he turned south and punched the stop-watch on the clock.

"Eighteen inches," he called to the Engineer. With her engines throttled back, Easy Uncle started to descend, while Leeming concentrated on holding an accurate track on a southerly course. That in itself needed all his skill. The wind strength and direction changed continuously as his altitude altered.

At 4,000 feet, eight minutes out, he was still in cloud. He made a procedure turn back on to a northerly heading towards the beacon. Now he was running dead in the direction of the mountains with the wind behind him. He turned and twisted Easy Uncle to force her onto the right track.

The plane wallowed and jerked in the violent air. At 1,000 feet, they were still in cloud. Rain lashed down over the windscreens, while the wipers clanked uselessly to and fro across the glass.

Leeming explained to Cockcroft carefully: "Don't let me get below 600 feet. Pull back on the stick if I do. I'll be on instruments all the time. Once we leave the beacon and head in the direction of the airport, we're on our own. The wind'll blow us to hell . . . so when you see the runway lights, point them out to me immediately."

"Will you do the timing, sir?" Cockcroft asked in a brisk, efficient voice.

"You bet I will," Leeming said grimly. "One minute . . . one minute only. If we can't see anything then, we'll turn back out to sea."

Easy Uncle was now down to circuit speed. Leeming approached the beacon at 600 feet, still in thick black cloud and streaming rain. When the needle whipped over, Leeming wrenched the aircraft round eighty degrees to starboard, and punched the stop-watch once more.

The landing-gear and sixty-per-cent flap were down, and the landing check completed. The speed fluctuated unsteadily between 100 and 130 knots. He was timing carefully. Fifteen seconds went by. Easy Uncle was still at 600 feet. Then wisps of cloud scudded past them and out of the corner of his eye he saw lights.

"Runway!" Cockcroft shouted. "Turn fifteen degrees to port. We're nearly on top of it, sir."

Even as he turned to the left, cutting off all the power on the engines, the small unoccupied part of Leeming's brain thought, this is strange. If anything, the runway should be to the right. But then . . . the wind was strong. It was fluctuating wildly. Their drift must be terrific. *Could* be to port.

In any case, all his reflexes had been highly trained to obey an instruction immediately. Easy Uncle swung obediently round Cockcroft's fifteen degrees to port.

Leeming took his eyes away from the ghostly glow of the instruments, and peered through the windscreen.

He saw a long, low row of orange lights, far too bright for an electric flare-path. The altimeter flickered at 200 feet. He saw car lights moving over a glossy surface. A brilliant neon sign flashed out in a damp red and blue: BEVERLEY'S FOR EVERYTHING.

The shop windows glittered onto Constitution Street, Kingston's main thoroughfare.

Leeming shouted, " Gear up, rated power."

The engines roared up to forty-five inches manifold pressure immediately. The whole aircraft shuddered at the sudden powerful thrust from the airscrews. He knew now that they were pointing towards the high mountains that started not more than a mile away.

He pulled the stick hard over to the right, tilting the Marlborough up into a vertical turn, trying to pivot round on his wing-tip. All the time, he kept the aircraft just below cloud at 600 feet. That at least gave him some idea of where he was going. The sweat ran down his hands, making the controls wet and slippery.

" You clot! " he yelled at Cockcroft, his whole body shaking with fury. " You goddamned, bloody, stupid little clot! "

Somehow or other, he had to get on a southerly course, back out to sea. In the few seconds of the turn, as the heavy aircraft banged up and down in the streaming wet air, Easy Uncle was being blown by a gale-force beam wind nearer and nearer to the invisible mountains.

Leeming saw quite clearly the trees below him, and the lights flaming out from the little bungalows.

With an agonizing slowness, the gyro in front of him moved round from an easterly heading. Just for a moment, he saw a man's black face glistening under a street lamp, so close that it seemed to be stuck, like an extra navigation light, on the end of his now-vertical starboard wing.

And then, suddenly, the gyro read south again.

Leeming hauled back on the control column, and Easy Uncle leapt up into the cloud once more.

When they were at 8,000 feet, he said to the Radio Officer, " Tell Control . . . weather too bad at Kingston. Proceeding to my alternate aerodrome, Nassau."

The rest of the one-and-a-half-hour flight to the Bahamas passed in utter silence on the flight deck of the Marlborough. Just beyond Cuba, they edged out of bad weather into a clear night. Leeming saw Nassau Island gleaming in the moonlight, over fifty miles away.

When the engines had stopped at the ramp on Oakes Field, Cockcroft said in a low voice, " I'm very sorry, sir. Very sorry indeed."

Leeming couldn't bring himself to speak to the man just then. He got out of his seat, and climbed down the front steps into the hot Nassau night.

When they were all in the Operations Office, making up the flight plan to Bermuda, Leeming for the first time appeared to notice his First Officer's presence by his side.

He turned towards him and said very slowly, " You didn't tell me, Mr. Cockcroft. What exactly *did* you do . . . that time you hit the thunderstorm over Blackpool? "

In the voyage report that would eventually find its way to the Line Manager's desk, Leeming wrote: *Attempted a let-down at Kingston. Weather unsuitable for landing. Continued to Nassau, where Jamaica passengers were off-loaded.*

As far as Cockcroft's attempt at getting him to land in the main street at Kingston was concerned, that could wait till he made up his confidential crew reports on his return to London. Then, he intended to spread himself. A thorough going-over, back in the Training School, would knock the self-confidence right out of the man, and teach him to think before he opened his big mouth. Leeming had already made up his mind to write him down as " completely unfit at this stage to operate on the Line."

There had been some grumbling among the Captains over this new batch of inexperienced First Officers, but this was the first time he himself had flown with any but the shy ones, obedient and anxious to learn. He had no desire to see Mr. Cockcroft out on a trip with him again. Not for a long, long time.

To give the First Officer some inkling of what was in his mind, he flew the five-hour leg from Nassau to Bermuda, without once letting Cockcroft touch the controls. The man sat like a dummy, uselessly staring out of the window, and saying every now and then, " Are you sure you don't want a rest, sir? "

As they circled Kindly Field, Leeming did the before-landing checks (most of which were normally done by the First Officer) completely by himself. He obtained his own clearance to land from the Tower. When they were on the ground, and Cockcroft started to read out the after-landing checklist, Leeming took it away from him and started calling it out himself, starting again at the beginning, while his own hands dealt with all the levers and the switches.

He handed Easy Uncle over to Captain Mark Kelston, who met him as he clambered down from the aircraft.

"Saw on the notice-board you went on to Nassau, Mike," Kelston said.

"Kingston weather was out."

"Did you make a let-down?"

"Yes . . . but you know what the beacon's like there. Terrible wind, too. Raining like hell."

"Forecast?"

Leeming snorted, "What do *you* think?"

They walked together over to the Operations Room. Mark said, "Anyway, it's made you half an hour ahead of schedule. Which I shall promptly lose on the next leg."

"Bad winds?"

"Dead on the nose. Twelve and a half hours."

Leeming whistled. "Bit unusual . . . this time of year."

"There's a low sitting south of track. Too big to get round."

"Strong easterlies all the way?"

"Just about," Kelston sighed.

They stopped before they got to the Airport Buildings, and watched the morning twilight touch the huge Castle Harbour Hotel on the other side of the Bay.

Mark said suddenly, "What's your First Officer like?"

Leeming hesitated. He had no intention of telling another Captain the details of the botched let-down at Kingston. A mistake like that reflected on himself. He, after all, was fully responsible for what went on in his aircraft.

Then he allowed the opinion, "Overconfident."

Kelston laughed. "I've got the other extreme. Underconfident. Hardly likes to touch anything."

"I suppose pilots are hard to get these days. Oh, well," Leeming said vaguely, as he walked off, "these things are sent to try us. Have a good trip."

After seven hours' deep sleep, Leeming sat in the garden of the Saracen Hotel, fresh and rested up. The warm evening air reeked with the sweet smell of the dying cedars. Already he was finding that time lay heavily on his hands.

Some people, he supposed, would give their eye-teeth for a chance of these regular brief holidays in such places as Bermuda and Panama. And here he was, glad enough to talk to his Navigator, Appleby, whose thin, whining voice had always before jarred and irritated him.

Appleby remarked, "Reckon young Cockcroft'll find himself engaged if he goes on at this rate."

"He *does* seem to be seeing a lot of the stewardess," Leeming said.

" Queer sort of girl," Appleby ruminated, searching his mind for the final verdict. " Likeable. Amusing. Bit too restless for me."

Leeming turned the conversation round to aeroplanes. It was a safer subject. But all the time, he was only half listening to the whine that went on and on. His mouth said the appropriate responses mechanically, while his whole consciousness was absorbed with Libby Challoner.

He remembered how that night in Panama her perfume had filled the little space where they were locked together with tropical flowers. The bed was a darkened jungle, and Libby herself a white wild animal that threatened his life. Her small arms twisted round his neck with a strength that bit into his skin. The insistence of her body taunted and inflamed him. Like a white-hot torch, it touched off desires that had remained invisible inside him, which leapt up, alight and alive.

Then gradually it grew on him that he owned this scene. This was now part of his life, a coloured slide for the magic lantern of his memory to hold for ever. Now the short, sweet satisfaction was over, the swift recession of the tide uncovered once more the barrier of his fears and scruples, which rose in huge, conventional accusation above a bleak and empty waste.

In Panama he had felt some pleasure in telling her that it was all finished. The whole thing was rubbed out. His character was back where it had started, wholesome and untarnished. But now of all the damned things to feel, he was actually missing her. He missed her inconsequential chatter, her irresponsible gaiety. No sooner had he got himself rid of her than he was regretting it. Worst of all, he was missing her physically. He longed to touch her face, run his hands over her smooth, soft body.

Next day, he kept himself in check with difficulty, as he listened to Cockcroft and Libby making their hilarious plans together at breakfast and lunch. He was now distant with both of them. Cockcroft was obviously frightened of what he was officially going to say about him. And Libby . . . well, Libby was just being her infuriating feminine self.

That afternoon, he saw Libby set off on her own into Hamilton. He heard her say she had some things to buy to take back to England. Fifty yards behind the swaying yellow skirt, he followed her into the town. Just before she went into a dress-shop, he caught up with her and took her arm.

" Here, Libby," he said, " I want to talk to you."

She turned her big blue eyes innocently on to him.

" Not *again*, Captain? Surely not again? What have I done this time? "

"Nothing," he said. "Just . . . I don't want to quarrel with you."

"I'm not quarrelling."

"I don't think you realize. I've got a lot of responsibilities. Sometimes . . . they get on top of me."

"Well, they're *your* responsibilities. Nobody else's."

He led her to the door of a café. "Here," he said unhappily. "Let's go in here."

Over coffee, he tried once more. "You know what a hell of a mess Kelston is making for himself over that girl in the Azores."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Nothing. Of course, nothing. Except—"

Her face seemed to soften. "Go on. Except what?"

"Well, I didn't want to get you into the same sort of trouble. Wouldn't be fair."

"What you really mean is you were scared people would find out."

He saw she was going to exact her full pound of flesh. He was not to be allowed the private privilege of having things glossed over. But at least she was listening to him now. The look in the blue eyes was far less hostile.

"I suppose so," he admitted. Then he qualified it, "Not altogether."

"They're not going to find out now. It's all over. Nobody had a chance to find out."

"Yes, I know," he hesitated. "All the same, I want us to be . . . friends."

She said gently, "What are you trying to tell me, Michael?"

"Just that I like you."

"Well, I like *you*, too. Funnily enough, I've really tried hard to please you. And all I get is a good ticking-off."

"I know, I know. Let's forget about that, shall we?"

She leaned towards him, suddenly confidential and affectionate. "You mean . . . rub it out so it never really happened?"

"Yes," he said. "Let's do that." He tried his best to smile at her.

She gave him an immediate bright smile in return, and put her cool fingers across the table to take his hand.

"I told you the truth in Panama. You really *do* attract me," she said, "somehow, even when you're being solemn and pompous and all Big Captain."

Then she took her bag, and stood up.

"Better get some shopping done, I suppose. Early-closing day tomorrow." And she tripped out of the café, the yellow skirt still swinging gaily to and fro.

He didn't see her again, except at dinner. She had on the same black dress as she had worn that night in Panama. Leeming thought she seemed friendlier. But still most of her attention was given to Cockcroft. Immediately after their meal, they went out together for the evening.

He had a couple of beers by himself at the bar. He supposed that Libby and Cockcroft, being much the same age, shared the same outlook and the same animal energy.

He felt rather old and unwanted. Going over in his mind what had happened that afternoon, he wondered whether Libby had really understood what he had tried to say.

With a certain tingling pride, he remembered anyway that she said he attracted her.

Leeming went to bed early. Hours later, when he'd dropped off to sleep, he felt the sheet being pulled away. In a half-conscious state, he put his hand out to pull it up once again. He felt thin silk and cold, soft flesh.

Libby's voice said, " You *are* an old sleepy-head, aren't you? "

He opened his eyes to see her fair head glowing in the darkness beside him. She was sitting on the bed in a red dressing-gown. Lightly resting herself against him, she ran her fingers through his brown hair.

" I thought I'd let you know, Michael . . . that I understood."

He sat up in bed and put his arms round her shoulders.

" Yet you run off with Cockcroft all evening."

" Oh, *him*. He's sometimes quite amusing. You're not really jealous, are you? "

" Of that man? "

She sighed. " Pity."

He sat looking at the white face so near his own.

" Well, now I've come here, aren't you going to kiss me? "

He pulled her closer, as she nestled down beside him on the bed.

" That's better," she said. " Kiss and make up. That's what they always say." She clung to him hard. The dressing-gown fell apart, and he felt the thin silk nightdress warmed by her body.

" You're an odd person, *Liebling*," she whispered. " When I'm with you, I get the feeling I'm flirting with one of the apostles."

He made a wry face, " Can't be much fun."

" Oh, but you're wrong! " she said. " These days . . . it's so unusual! "

She left just before dawn. Tying the red dressing-gown tightly around her, she kissed him on the forehead, and tiptoed out through the door.

Two minutes later, she was back. She flung herself on the bed, almost helpless with laughter.

"What's the matter, Libby?" He took her by the shoulders. "For heaven's sake, don't make so much noise."

"It was Cockcroft." She was still laughing. "Just as I was closing your door, I ran into Cockcroft. And the look on his face, *Liebling* . . . the look on his face!"

On the trip home, in aircraft Easy Zebra, Leeming let Cockcroft do rather more of the flying than he did himself. He intended to watch him. It would be grossly unfair to jump to a hasty conclusion after just one mistake.

During the long flight to the Azores, as they sat together up at the front, with the bright sun above them and the clouds and the sea below, they talked about flying and planes and people.

He wasn't such a bad sort of boy, Leeming thought, once you got through that self-important skin. His instrument-flying was a bit rough. Certainly, he alternated between a clumsy slowness, and a breath-taking, alarming speed. But you had to take into consideration the fact that he wasn't very experienced. Competence could only come with practice.

At Madrid, he let Cockcroft land the Marlborough from the left-hand seat. It was a perfect night. No wind. Excellent visibility.

They came down with a bump.

Cockcroft said, "Not the sort of landing you do, I'm afraid, sir."

Leeming smiled indulgently. "You're out of practice. That's all it is."

He did the ship's paper work as they approached the December fog that had settled over England. He wrote in his voyage report: "On schedule. Smooth trip."

When he came to the crew's confidential reports, he thought for a minute. He looked at Cockcroft, taking the Marlborough down slowly over the coast.

Then he put them away. He wouldn't bother to write confidential reports. Not this time. Not on this trip.

★ ★ ★

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE

The modern cult of "hobbies" was not then in favour. Hobbies, however, can be overdone in school premises; I am reminded of the Inspector of Education who asked a pupil of the so-called under-privileged type what he was doing and received the swift and frank reply, "It's my 'obby and I 'ate it."

IVOR BROWN, *The Way of My World*

COME FOR A PICNIC

And to the swan-delighting river
The careless picnics come

W. H. AUDEN, *Look, Stranger!*

Mr. Underwood lay back on a slope of moss, with a plaid beneath him, and a cushion under his head, and said that the Elysian fields must have been a prevision of this beech-wood. Mrs. Underwood, with Felix and Wilmet, tied up the plates, knives and forks; and then the mother, taking Angela with her, went to negotiate kettle-boiling at the cottage.

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE,
The Pillars of the House

Cold Collation

There, on a slope of orchard, Francis laid
A damask napkin wrought with horse and hound,
Brought out a dusky loaf that smelt of home,
And, half-cut-down, a pasty costly-made,
Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay,
Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks
Imbedded and injellied; last, with these,
A flask of cider from his father's vats,
Prime, which I knew; and so we sat and eat
And talk'd old matters over.

ALFRED TENNYSON, *Audley Court*

Déjeuner sur l'Herbe

During lunch, the men waited on the women, who sat with expressions nicely combining expectation and indifference, and, like unfledged birds, opening their mouths and accepting with grateful cries what was brought to them. Cleo was impressed by the difference in the assigning of responsibility, for in England it is the woman who must be the provider at a picnic. She must attend to the distribution of the food, it is upon her that any reproach must fall, at her door any omission will be laid. Only Juliette, liberally supplied with sausage, sat a little apart, independent and self-sufficient, slicing sausage and conveying the slices into her mouth with the precision of a piece of fine machinery.

Even the most gallant man would hesitate to treat Juliette as a little woman. She had brought her own supplies; two buttered pistolets in one pocket of her hideous striped skirt, a bottle of vin ordinaire in the other, and fastened to her belt, a parcel containing the sausages and a hunk of cheese. These would noticeably have altered the silhouette and mobility of a lesser woman, but they made no difference to Juliette, who strode up the rough tracks with her back straight and her eyes fixed on the sky ahead.

Now she cut off a piece of sausage and handed it to Cleo. "Eat," she said. "This will give you heart for the climb."

The sausage was rubbery in texture, in colour dark pink with white specks embedded like mosaic. The flavour, pleasant at first, became more potent the longer the sausage remained in the mouth. After prolonged mastication, and a total refusal of her throat muscles to swallow the lump, Cleo managed, by pretending a sudden interest in a piece of thyme, to hide most of it under a stone.

"Goodness," she said, drawing a deep breath, "your mother must be a marvellous cook."

ELISABETH HARGREAVES, *The Miss*

The Archaeological Picnic

In this high pasturage, the Blunden time,
With Lady's Finger, Smokewort, Lovers' Loss,
And lin-lan-lone a Tennysonian chime
Stirring the sorrel and the gold-starred moss,
Cool is the chancel, bright the Altar cross.

Drink, Mary, drink your fizzy lemonade
And leave the king-cups. Take your grey felt hat;
Here where the low side window lends a shade,
There, where the key lies underneath the mat
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sat.

Sweet smell of cerements and cold wet stones,
Hassock and cassock, paraffin and pew,
Green in a light which that sublime Burne-Jones
White-hot and wondering from the glass kiln drew
Gleams and re-gleams the Trans arcade anew.

So stand you waiting, freckled innocence!
For me the squinch and squint and Trans arcade:
For you, where meadow grass is evidence
With flattened pattern by our picnic made,
One bottle more of fizzy lemonade.

JOHN BETJEMAN

We all unpacked our baskets, and employed ourselves in getting dinner ready. Red Whisker pretended he could make a salad (which I don't believe), and obtruded himself on public notice. Some of the young ladies washed the lettuces for him, and sliced them under his directions. Dora was among these. I felt that Fate had pitted me against this man, and one of us must fall.

Red Whisker made his salad (I wondered how they could eat it. Nothing should have induced *me* to touch it!) and voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, being an ingenious beast, in the hollow trunk of a tree. By-and-by I saw him, with the majority of a lobster on his plate, eating his dinner at the feet of Dora!

I have but an indistinct idea of what happened for some time after this baleful object presented itself to my view. I was very merry, I know; but it was a hollow merriment. I attached myself to a young creature in pink, with little eyes, and flirted with her desperately. She received my attentions with favour; but whether on my account solely, or because she had any designs on Red Whisker, I can't say. Dora's health was drunk. When I drank it, I affected to interrupt my conversation for that purpose, and to resume it immediately afterwards. I caught Dora's eye as I bowed to her, and I thought it looked appealing. But it looked at me over the head of Red Whisker, and I was adamant.

CHARLES DICKENS,
David Copperfield

Diversion

Hir freendes saw that it was no disport
To romen by the see, but disconfort,
And shopen for to pleyen somewhere elles.
They leyden hire by ryveres, and by welles,
And eek in othere places delitables;
They dauncen, and they pleyen at ches and tables.
So on a day, right in the morwe tyde,
Unto a garden that was ther bisyde,
In which that they hadde maad hir ordinaunce
Of vitaille, and of oother purveiaunce,
They goon and pleye hem al the longe day;
And this was on the sixte morwe of May.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER,
The Frankeleyns Tale

HAT TRICK

It's wonderful when bums like us become millionaires

by PAUL GALLICO

THIS story begins many years ago on the bridge that spans the Corinth Canal in Greece, that narrow, man-made ditch that makes an island out of the Peloponnesian Peninsula and saves a day or so sailing time to and from Piræus.

As you gaze down from it, a ship, moving through the towering brown walls of the cut, looks like the vivid toy of a child, and the crew and passengers resemble foreshortened dolls with white, upturned, indistinguishable faces.

The smooth progress of a ship proceeding overland, as it were, hauled by its black, insectlike outrider of a tug, has an irresistible attraction for spectators above who wave and shout down unintelligible greetings. The passengers reply in like manner from far below, and thus there is established a kind of friendly contact between the voyagers and the stay-at-homes.

This was the emotion felt by George Pavlides, a road worker, as he paused on the bridge on his way home from Souidas, where he worked, to Nikodimou, the little village where he lived.

A cheerful, kindly fellow always doing favours for people and known for giving of his best on the job, George had not amounted to very much in life, but this fact did not weigh upon him. There was still plenty of time. He was young, no more than twenty-five, strong, and of a generous, happy, and carefree disposition, as sunny as the land of his birth.

He had clothes to cover himself, enough to eat and drink, and the girls had an eye for him, as he was six feet tall with big brown shoulders, a handsome head with dark, curling hair, and virile moustaches. In all, he was well content with life.

The craft now passing in the narrow ditch below was snow-white with a single buff funnel, on either side of which was affixed a relief in metal of a charging, winged lion.

This gallant sight delighted Pavlides as it did many others passing likewise on the bridge. They shouted and waved; handkerchiefs fluttered in the hands of the tiny figures beneath, as the passengers on the liner returned the greeting.

Pavlides removed his hat and swung it violently back and forth

in a gesture of salute and bonhomie towards the strangers gliding by.

He waved it, in fact, so violently and enthusiastically that it suddenly escaped the grip of his fingers, and was wafted first this way, then that, by the strong air currents in the cut. Then it sank rapidly to make a miraculous landing on the forward deck of the ship at the feet of a passenger, who picked it up, donned it for an instant, and then waved it back at its former owner.

At this, George Pavlides shouted with laughter. He yelled, he chuckled, he roared, he bellowed. He pounded his sides; he thumped the back of a policeman standing next to him.

"Look, look!" he cried. "My hat has gone off by itself on a voyage. Where do you suppose it is bound?"

The policeman, who had recognized the Italian flag and the insignia on the funnel as being the Lion of St. Mark, replied, "To Venice, most likely. Was it a good hat?"

"An old friend," said Pavlides. "I have had it for years. Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho! Did you ever see anything so amusing?"

In the meantime the ship was gliding on through the cut growing smaller and smaller, soon to vanish in the distance.

Still laughing and shaking his curly, hatless head, Pavlides shouldered his tools and continued on his way home.

But that night he found himself, for the first time in his life, strangely restless and no longer entirely contented.

It was true the hat was an old friend. Now it had left him unceremoniously and gone off to see the world, leaving him behind. Ought he not to follow it? One does not desert old friends thus. It was not the fault of the hat that this had happened. If Venice was where his headgear had gone, then maybe he, too, ought to journey thither.

Soon he felt this overwhelmingly.

The next day, Pavlides quit his job and set out to work his way to Venice, where he arrived eventually, in good health, and full of admiration for this wonderful city.

Unable to speak a word of Italian, he sought out a restaurant where, sure enough, there were some Greeks who explained to the proprietor that this strong, handsome newcomer had come there from Corinth in pursuit of his hat. This so impressed the owner that he gave Pavlides a job as a dish-washer and later, when he had learnt something of the language, a post as a waiter.

One day, wandering in the Piazza San Marco, Pavlides passed a shipping-office in the window of which was a picture of the very vessel onto which his hat had fallen, or at least one like it. He went in to ask about it.

Ordinarily, someone who offered in broken Italian such a query as—" Eight months ago, this beautiful vessel of yours passed beneath our splendid bridge across the Corinth Canal and I dropped my hat. Can you tell me what has become of it?"—would have been dismissed as a madman. But Pavlides' smile was so warm and sincere and his brown eyes so trusting that they actually listened to him.

Then, miracle of miracles, a junior clerk sitting at a far desk bethought himself, " I remember something of the sort. There was a passenger, who came in here, who spoke of such an incident and said that he had retrieved the hat."

But he could recall nothing else about him. " I only know that he was on his way to America," he added.

Pavlides thanked him, and went back to the restaurant, determined to go to America. " For," he explained, " I have found out that my hat has gone there, and if my hat wishes me to go to America, that is where I must go also."

The Italians thought him mad, but the Greeks, being, like Pavlides, free souls, understood him perfectly and directed him to the American Consul where he must apply for permission to emigrate to that country. This official asked Pavlides his reason for wishing to go to the New World.

" Because my hat has journeyed there," he explained through an interpreter, " and where my hat is, I should be likewise." And he told him the story of the beautiful boat that had passed beneath the bridge and what had occurred.

The Consul—this was before the days of quotas—roared with laughter and said to his clerk, " Of all the cock-eyed reasons I ever heard . . . Give the chap the permit. I like him."

This was the way it was. Everybody liked George Pavlides.

Six months later he left for America, and because he had troubled to learn some English, he was able to secure a job as a waiter aboard a Greek-American liner, on which he made a number of crossings to save some money before stepping ashore with his wife on the then-more-hospitable shores of Ellis Island.

Ah yes, the wife he acquired was a tall, beautiful Greek girl with dark hair—a real woman—by the name of Sophia Karakeno who came from the island of Cythera, and was a stewardess.

George loved her for her warmth and good nature as well as her expressive eyes and her full, uncomplicated femininity. During several voyages he wooed her ardently.

" Marry me," he urged her, " and we will go ashore in America and find my hat together. After all, that is why I have come all this great distance. You will see, it will lead us to fame and fortune."

Sophia looked in despair at this handsome, apparently irresponsible young man who actually did seem to have travelled this far for no other reason than to retrieve an old hat he had carelessly dropped from a bridge in far-off Corinth.

"What is one to do with one such as you?" she protested. "I do not wish to get married, but it is obvious that a fellow like you needs someone to look after him. Very well. I will marry you, but only on condition that afterwards there is no further nonsense about a hat."

And with this, George Pavlides was for the time well content, for he was convinced that in Sophia he had acquired the most wonderful woman in the world.

The rise of those two giants of the entertainment world, George Pavlides, picture-theatre magnate, and Myer ("The Skimmer") McManus, president of Worldover Pictures of Hollywood, was almost simultaneous. Although they had never met, the struggle in which they became involved was the result of an intense personal dislike dating from a contretemps which I shall narrate shortly.

Each refused to give in. Newspapers had printed Pavlides' statement, "If I am ever cotch making business with that skonks, I will donate a millions dollars colds cash to Grik orphans tsildrens."

Equally, McManus had been quoted, "Any time I make a deal with that hyena, sure and I'll donate a million dollars to be divided equally between Hebrew and Irish orphans."

This split was made necessary by the fact that McManus was one of those oddities of nature, an Irish Jew from Dublin, combining the finest features of each. The various orphans hoped for the best, but, in view of the intensity of the feud, there did not seem to be much chance of their collecting.

McManus's nickname, "The Skimmer," derived from the fact that, since he had flashed like a comet upon the moving-picture horizon a quarter of a century ago, nobody, outside his immediate family and a few intimate friends, had ever seen what the top of his head looked like. For he never appeared at a production conference, board meeting, financial discussion, story round-table, or big Worldover premier, uncovered.

There were many rumours abroad as to why he never bared his head in public. One was that he was orthodoxly religious; another, that, owing to some strange disease suffered in childhood, his hair grew only in small green tufts; and a third, that he had not only no hair at all, but that the top of his skull was missing and you could see his great brain throbbing underneath his scalp.

In any case, he was no fool, and held the film world in the hollow of his hand. The only figure that matched him in our era was George Pavlides, the one-time Greek immigrant, who had risen to the ownership of three-quarters of the great moving-picture cathedrals in the principal cities of the United States.

The Pavlides who had come ashore at Ellis Island with his handsome, strapping wife, long ago, was already a very different individual from the one who had laid down his pick and shovel in the Peloponnesus to follow in the path of his errant hat.

He was now able to speak Italian, a smattering of French, and something that passed for English. He had been around, and seen a little of the world and its ways; he had a profession with which he could always earn a living no matter where, since good waiters were scarce. And he was no longer alone.

He retained his cheerful, generous, sunny disposition and his capacity for hard and devoted work. Journeying to San Francisco, he secured a job in a restaurant. He had the gift of being able to deposit a plate of noodle soup or an order of Yankee pot-roast before a customer with the air of one who has the good fortune to be serving a king; not only that, but his example infected others working with him.

In no time at all, he was head waiter. Later, he was able to purchase an interest, and when a grateful partner died and left him his share, he became sole owner.

His personality, solicitude for his clients, and little generosities, such as giving away the after-dinner coffee, mints, bonbons, and cigarettes, plus his wife's excellent business sense, made the restaurant a success. Shortly after, he opened another, and another, extending his chain to New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia.

Fifteen years from the time he landed in New York, he was a millionaire.

The hat was all but forgotten or, at least, never mentioned in the Pavlides mansion atop San Francisco's Nob Hill where he made his home with his stately wife and their three boys and two girls.

In 1939, a fellow-Greek who owned a picture-theatre in St. Louis found himself in difficulties. With characteristic generosity, Pavlides bought the place from him at a price far beyond its worth, helping his friend out of his troubles, but landing himself with a white elephant.

He promptly went to St. Louis, and threw himself into the theatre business. Within a year he had evolved the famous Pavlides Palace System, by which the patron not only saw the finest feature films and stage shows from deep, plush seats uniform

all over the house, but also, because of Pavlides' love of people and his desire to make them happy, was the recipient of all kinds of gifts and benefits.

There was a nursery where mothers could leave babies; a television room where father could catch the end of the night game; free lemonade in paper cups was passed down the aisles during the intervals. Children were presented with bonbons and bubble gum, skull-caps, six-shooters, or ray-guns—whatever was in fashion—while their mothers received recipe-books, aprons, small, useful household articles. There was always a surprise of some sort. Everything, in short, that could delight the patron, increase his comfort and enhance his enjoyment of the film was freely lavished.

Naturally, the result was that the Pavlides Palace in St. Louis became a huge success and soon made money hand over fist. Within ten years there were Pavlides Palaces in all the key cities of the United States, and George stood at the top of the entertainment world. At last he had found a field in which he was truly content. He sold out his restaurant chain in order to concentrate upon his theatre empire.

It was at this point that he became involved in the battle with " Skimmer " McManus, which shook the nation, and eventually threatened both men with ruin.

This came about when Pavlides threw the new McManus picture, *Body of Love*, out of all the Pavlides Palaces. It starred Tanya Tanot, an ex-saleslady better known for outsize glands than histrionic talent, and Ramon Gentile, a Latin scoundrel.

In one of his rare public utterances Pavlides remarked of this film, " Is steenky pictsoor. Steenky pictsoor is not good for tsildrens to see, bot it is even worses for mothers. We will not play steenky pictsoors in Pavlides Palaces."

Naturally, " Skimmer " McManus took umbrage, particularly since he was known to have occasional lapses of taste and this was definitely one of them. The phenomenal luck characteristic of his entire career, did not desert him, and the film did well in other houses, but Pavlides' just criticism stung. McManus permitted himself to be quoted to the effect that that Greek ex-strawberry-pie hustler wouldn't know a picture if he saw one.

This reference to his earlier days as a knight of the black tie and apron hit Pavlides where it hurt most. For the first and only time, he lost his temper and referred to McManus as " Abie's Irish Stinkweed," and the battle to the death was joined. No World-over film could get a booking on the Pavlides Palace circuit. No Pavlides Palace could get any Myer McManus picture.

Each might have been able to survive this, and the feud could

have run an uninterrupted course, but for the sudden advent of 3D. In the scramble to get aboard the bandwagon, both men committed a fatal error.

Negotiating swiftly and secretly, Pavlides bought the rights to equip his theatres to show Life-o-Scope, which was the last word in dimensional illusion. The actors not only came down off the screen and sat in the laps of the patrons, but practically went home with them after the show.

Operating equally rapidly and sub rosa, McManus bought the rights to cameras, sound, and producing equipment of Life-o-Scope.

And there they were. When the news broke, it rocked the film world. For McManus could not show his films in any but Pavlides Theatres, while the Pavlides equipment would now screen only McManus pictures. Yet both would have remained stubborn, preferring rather to go bankrupt than meet one another.

But the pressure was irresistible. For they were not only rugged individualists, but heads of commercial empires upon whom thousands of innocent people depended for a living.

The news leaked out that Myer " Skimmer " McManus and George Pavlides were at last to meet and try to iron out the tangle into which they had got themselves.

The meeting was held on neutral ground in Santa Barbara, in between San Francisco and Hollywood. Reporters and photographers were foiled by elaborate security precautions. As well as the two principals, it was agreed that an attorney and a secretary should be present for each.

An elaborate time schedule was set up. First the secretaries appeared, carrying pencil, paper, and supplies, to prepare the arena, then the two lawyers with briefcases materialized at the same moment, and took up their stations.

At the stroke of 10 a.m., the two titans entered simultaneously by opposite doors of the conference room, marched stiffly to the battle-ground, and took their seats. Each, by further agreement, communicated with the other only through the medium of his lawyer.

Behind the doors waited a further retinue of lawyers, general managers, vice-presidents, and press agents.

At exactly one minute past ten, one of these, with a shameless eye to a keyhole, cried out, " Great Jehoshaphat, they're killing one another! " For it looked as though the two principals were locked across the table in a swaying, clutching, hair-pulling brawl to the death. But so strict were the orders that no one dared enter to separate them.

Yet it was not entirely so. And it is my privilege now, by what

means I am not at liberty to reveal, to relate for the first time what really happened.

No sooner had the two men seated themselves at opposite sides of the table than Pavlides was seen staring at McManus as if he were a ghost. However, there was nothing ghostly about the film producer who, like the Greek, was a big man and well-built, with a square head, and pinkish eyebrows over shrewd blue eyes. He was dressed in a natty dark suit, and shirt with bow-tie to match, and the only unusual thing about him was the fact that he was wearing a . . .

"That hots—!" cried Pavlides, pointing to the somewhat disreputable, stained, and crumpled headgear that crowned McManus—"Where you get that hots?"

McManus, outraged at this incredible demonstration of lèse-majesté, as in his orbit no one even mentioned the hat, much less asked him where he had got it, started to say, "None of your gah—" when, with an unearthly cry of joy, Pavlides reached across the table and pounced.

"That's my hots what I lose forty years ago."

The battle was thereupon joined. For a few moments, it swayed back and forth across the table to cries of, "Leggo, you idiot"—"My hots, my hots, my old friend"—"Take your hands off me or I'll punch your nose"—"Give me back my hots"—"Ugh, ye spalpeen, ye'll pay for this—"

Then, suddenly Pavlides prevailed. The hat came off, and he held it clutched in trembling fingers. The secretaries and attorneys had eyes only for the top of McManus's head now that his dread secret had been so suddenly and dramatically bared. But there was nothing to be seen there but some quite ordinary strands of pinkish grey hair to match the eyebrows. Could it be that the secret was that there *was* no secret?

Possessed of the hat, Pavlides turned it swiftly, looked into the sweat-band, and then hugged it to his chest with another cry of joy. "My hots, my hots. I knew it." Then he shouted at McManus, "I know where you got this hots. On a ship sailing through the Corinth Canal when it fells from bridge."

All the indignation and fight went out of Myer McManus and he turned deathly pale. "My God," he said hoarsely, "how did you know?"

"Because," explained Pavlides, waving the hat to and fro in the manner in which he had done so long ago, "I am the fellows on the bridge who dropsing it!"

"Oh no," McManus moaned, and he suddenly looked twenty years older. And then, "It must be true. There's nobody else

in the world would know that." Then he turned his stricken eyes upon his opponent.

" Don't take the hat," he pleaded. " Sell it to me. Sure, and I'll give you anything you ask for it. Just name it."

It was a testimony to his basic honesty that he did not try to lie out of it or even question that the hat belonged to Pavlides and that he, McManus, must give it back.

And it was likewise characteristic of George Pavlides that he did not turn the obvious deep distress of his rival to business uses. On the contrary, his heart was touched. He asked, " Why you want it? What's thees hots to you? "

For a moment, McManus measured his opponent. Then he reached the decision that frankness was the best policy. There was too much at stake.

" 'Tis my lucky hat," he groaned. " Ever since it came floating down from that damned bridge and I put it on, I've had the breaks. I met the girl that I married on that boat, and the guy who financed my first picture. I tried it out. When I didn't wear the hat, I made mistakes. When I had the hat on, nothing could go wrong."

He sank his head in his hands for a moment and then continued in a further burst of candour, " It ain't me that's made Worldover Pictures—it's the hat. I've always known it. It's the hat always guessed right. Even that lousy *Body of Love* was a box-office winner, though it was a stinker."

" Ha! " shouted Pavlides triumphantly, " you admit thees was steenky pictsoor! "

McManus looked at him bleakly and then at the hat the Greek had crushed to his bosom. His silence was admission.

" Hokay! " said George Pavlides. " Now I tell you what I do. I *give* you the hots! And I give one millions dollars cash to Grik orphans tsildrens."

Myer " Skimmer " McManus looked like one reprieved by the Governor. Slowly his hands crept across the table; his fingers closed about the hat; reverently he lifted it and restored it to his head. Age fell away from him. Youth and confidence returned.

He said, " I take the hat. And I give one million dollars to the Hebrew and Irish orphans of the world."

" Hokay," Pavlides repeated, his huge face beaming with happiness. " Now I tell you whats we both do. We each give *two* millions dollars to the orphans. It's wonderful when bums like us become millionaires."

McManus swallowed and then said, " It's a deal."

" So," concluded Pavlides, " you been wearing my hots for forty years. Anybody wears my hots forty years is my brothers.

I do not fights with brothers. McManus pictsoors plays Pavlides Palaces."

McManus averred solemnly, " McManus Worldover Pictures books the Pavlides Palaces."

" Only," Pavlides suddenly admonished, " when I say a pictsoor is steenky—*is* steenky! "

Choler came to the McManus countenance, but only for an instant. Then his fingers once more caressed the brim of the battered old hat.

" *Is* steenky . . ." he assented.

The two men reached across the table and gripped hands with respect and the beginning of a deep affection.

That night when Pavlides arrived home, he said to his wife, " Ho, Sophia! You know whats? Today I find my hots what I dropsings off the bridge at Corinth. You know who is under it? Myer McManus. He is my brother now. We don't fights any more. This is lucky days for me. What a good thing back there in Nikodimou I make up my mind to go where my hots goes."

Sophia Pavlides, stately and beautiful with age, who had grown with her position into the sweetest and best-loved matron in San Francisco, went over to her huge, friendly-eyed husband, who was a man from the top of his grizzled curly head to the tips of his shoes, and kissed him.

" What a good thing, foolish man," she said, " that I make up my mind to follow where my heart goes."

★ ★ ★

DAY-DREAMING IN A TRAIN

Far and wide my thoughts go lazily wandering,
Leaping ahead of all reality and time
To distant cities, now but a picture of the mind,
Of heat, dirt, strange tongues and myriads of colour;
And even as I rumble through damp, foggy countryside
New perfumes, exotic, spicy, and sensually east
Intoxicate my senses and set my pulses throbbing
To a tempo drummed by native bongo players.
The dirty rivulets trickling down the carriage window-pane
Are my shimmering seas with silky beaches and swaying palms
That softly fan the dusky, singing fishermen.
Till at journey's end, gently drifting back from oriental fantasy,
A pair of English walking-shoes loom on the near horizon
And bid me wait my time and cease my train day-dreaming.

FLEUR MOUNTAIN

★ *Among the first writers to prove that science fiction is an exciting and enjoyable branch of story-telling, Ray Bradbury was introduced to Argosy readers in 1949 with his story, "The Long Years." As a tribute to his unique gifts, Argosy has pleasure in presenting one of his stories that is generally held to be among the finest science fiction ever written.*

GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN

by RAY BRADBURY

"SOUTH," said the captain.

"But," said his crew, "there *aren't* any directions out here in space."

"When you travel on down towards the sun," replied the captain, "and everything gets yellow and warm and lazy, then you're going in one direction only."

He shut his eyes and thought about the smouldering, warm, far-away land, his breath moving gently in his mouth. "South." He nodded slowly to himself. "South."

Their rocket was the *Copa de Oro*, also named the *Prometheus* and the *Icarus*, and their destination in all reality was the blazing noonday sun. In high good spirits they had packed two thousand sour lemonades and a thousand white-capped beers for this journey to the wide Sahara. And now, as the sun boiled up at them, they remembered a score of verses and quotations . . .

"*The golden apples of the sun?*"

"Yeats."

"*Fear no more the heat o' the sun?*"

"Shakespeare, of course!"

"*Cup of Gold?* Steinbeck. *The Crock of Gold?* Stephens. And what about the pot of gold at the rainbow's end? *There's* a name for our trajectory, by heaven. Rainbow!"

"Temperature?"

"One thousand degrees Fahrenheit!"

The captain stared from the huge, dark-lensed port, and there indeed was the sun, and to go to that sun and touch it and steal part of it for ever away was his quiet and single idea. In this ship were combined the coolly delicate and the coldly practical. Through corridors of ice and milk-frost, ammoniated winter and storming snowflakes blew. Any spark from that vast hearth

burning out there beyond the callous hull of this ship—any small fire-breath that might seep through—would find winter slumbering here, like all the coldest hours of February.

The audio-thermometer murmured in the arctic silence, " Temperature: two thousand degrees! "

Falling, thought the captain, like a snowflake into the lap of June, warm July, and the sweltering, dog-mad days of August.

" Three thousand degrees Fahrenheit! "

Under the snow-fields engines raced, refrigerants pumped ten thousand miles per hour in rimed, boa-constrictor coils.

" Four thousand degrees Fahrenheit."

Noon. Summer. July.

" Five thousand Fahrenheit! "

And at last the captain spoke with all the quietness of the journey in his voice, " Now we are touching the sun."

Their eyes, thinking it, were melted gold.

" Seven thousand degrees! "

Strange how a mechanical thermometer could sound excited, though it possessed only an emotionless steel voice.

" What *time* is it? " asked someone.

Everyone had to smile. For now there was only the sun and the sun and the sun. It was every horizon, it was every direction. It burnt the minutes, the seconds, the hour-glasses, the clocks; it burnt all time and eternity away. It burnt the eyelids and the serum of the dark world behind the lids, the retina, the hidden brain; and it burnt sleep and the sweet memories of sleep and cool nightfall.

" Watch it! "

" Captain! "

Bretton, the first mate, fell flat to the winter deck. His protective suit whistled where, burst open, his warmness, his oxygen, and his life bloomed out in a frosted steam.

" Quick! " Inside Bretton's plastic face-mask, milk crystals had already gathered in blind patterns. They bent to see.

" A structural defect in his suit, Captain. Dead."

" Frozen."

They stared at that other thermometer which showed how winter lived in this snowing ship. One thousand degrees below zero. The captain gazed down upon the frosted statue and the twinkling crystals that iced over it as he watched.

Irony of the coolest sort, he thought; a man afraid of fire and killed by frost.

The captain turned away. " No time. No time. Let him lie." He felt his tongue move. " Temperature? "

The dials jumped four thousand degrees. "Look. Will you look? Look."

Their icicle was melting.

The captain jerked his head to look at the ceiling. As if a motion-picture projector had jammed a single clear memory-frame in his head, he found his mind focused ridiculously on a scene whipped out of childhood.

On spring mornings as a boy, he had leaned from his bedroom window into the snow-smelling air to see the sun sparkle on the last icicle of winter. A dripping of white wine, the blood of cool but warming April, fell from that clear crystal blade. Minute by minute, December's weapon grew less dangerous. And then at last the icicle fell with the sound of a single chime to the gravelled walk below.

"Auxiliary pump's broken, sir. Refrigeration. We're losing our ice!"

A shower of warm rain shivered down upon them. The captain jerked his head right and left. "Can you see the trouble? Lord, don't stand there, we haven't time!"

The men rushed; the captain bent in the warm rain, cursing, felt his hands run over the cold machine, felt them burrow and search, and while he worked, he saw a future which was removed from them by the merest breath. He saw the skin peel from the rocket beehive; men, thus revealed, running, running; mouths shrieking, soundless. Space was a black, mossed well where life drowned its roars and terrors. Scream a big scream, but space snuffed it out before it was half up your throat. Men scurried, ants in a flaming matchbox; the ship was dripping lava, gushing steam, nothing!

"Captain?"

The nightmare flicked away. "Here."

He worked in the soft warm rain that fell from the upper decks. He fumbled at the auxiliary pump. "Damn it!" He jerked the feed line.

When it came, it'd be the quickest death in the history of dying. One moment, yelling; a warm flash later, only the billion billion tons of space-fire would whisper, unheard, in space. Popped like strawberries in a furnace, while their thoughts lingered on the scorched air a long breath after their bodies were charred roast and fluorescent gas.

"Damn!" He stabbed the auxiliary pump with a screwdriver. "Lord above!"

He shuddered. The complete annihilation of it. He clamped his eyes tight, teeth tight.

Lord, he thought, we're used to more leisurely dyings, measured

in minutes and hours. Even twenty seconds now would be a slow death compared to this hungry, idiot thing waiting to eat us!

"Captain, do we pull out or stay?"

"Get the Cup ready. Take over, finish this. Now!"

He turned and put his hand to the working mechanism of the huge Cup; shoved his fingers into the robot Glove. A twitch of his hand here moved a gigantic hand, with gigantic metal fingers, from the bowels of the ship. Now, now, the great metal hand slid out holding the huge *Copa de Oro*, breathless, into the iron furnace, the bodiless body and the fleshless flesh of the sun.

A million years ago, thought the captain, quickly, quickly, as he moved the hand and the Cup, a million years ago a naked man on a lonely northern trail saw lightning strike a tree. And while his clan fled, with bare hands he plucked a limb of fire, broiling the flesh of his fingers, to carry it, running in triumph, shielding it from the rain with his body, to his cave, where he shrieked out a laugh and tossed it full on a mound of leaves and gave his people summer. And the tribe crept at last, trembling, near the fire, and they put out their flinching hands and felt the new season in their cave, this small yellow spot of changing weather, and they too, at last, nervously, smiled.

And the gift of fire was theirs.

"Captain!"

It took all of four seconds for the huge hand to push the empty Cup to the fire. So here we are again, today, on another trail, he thought, reaching for a cup of precious gas and vacuum, a handful of different fire with which to run back up cold space, lighting our way, and take to Earth a gift of fire that might burn for ever. Why?

He knew the answer before the question.

Because the atoms we work with our hands, on Earth, are pitiful; the atomic bomb is pitiful and small and our knowledge is pitiful and small, and only the sun really knows what we want to know, and only the sun has the secret. And besides, it's fun, it's a chance, it's a great thing coming here, playing tag, hitting and running. There is no reason, really, except the pride and vanity of little insect men hoping to sting the lion and escape the maw. My God, we'll say, we *did* it!

And here is our cup of energy, fire, vibration, call it what you will, that may well power our cities and sail our ships and light our libraries and tan our children and bake our daily breads and simmer the knowledge of our universe for us for a thousand years until it is well done. Here, from this cup, all good men of science and religion, drink! Warm yourselves against the night of ignorance, the long snows of superstition, the cold winds of disbelief,

and from the great fear of darkness in each man. So we stretch out our hand with the beggar's cup . . .

" Ah."

The Cup dipped into the sun. It scooped up a bit of the flesh of God, the blood of the universe, the blazing thought, the blinding philosophy that set out and mothered a galaxy, that idled and swept planets in their fields, and summoned or laid to rest lives and livelihoods.

" Now, *slow*," whispered the captain.

" What'll happen when we pull it inside? That extra heat now, at this time, Captain? "

" Lord knows."

" Auxiliary pump all repaired, sir."

" Start it! "

The pump leapt on.

" Close the lid of the Cup, and inside now, slow, slow."

The beautiful hand outside the ship trembled, a tremendous image of his own gesture, sank with oiled silence into the ship's body. The Cup, lid shut, dripped yellow flowers and white stars, slid deep. The audio-thermometer screamed. The refrigerator system kicked; ammoniated fluids banged the walls like blood in the head of a shrieking idiot.

He shut the outer air-lock door. " Now."

They waited. The ship's pulse ran. The heart of the ship rushed, beat, rushed, the Cup of gold in it. The cold blood raced round, about, down, through, round, about, down, through.

The captain exhaled slowly. The ice stopped dripping from the ceiling. It froze again.

" Let's get out of here."

The ship turned and ran.

" Listen! "

The heart of the ship was slowing, slowing. The dials spun on down through the thousands; the needles whirred, invisible. The thermometer voice chanted the change of seasons.

They were all thinking now, together, Pull away and away from the fire and the flame, the heat and the melting, the yellow and the white. Go on out now to cool and dark.

In twenty hours perhaps they might even dismantle some refrigerators, let winter die. Soon they would move in night so cold it might be necessary to use the ship's new furnace, draw heat from the shielded fire they carried now like an unborn child.

They were going home.

They were going home and there was some little time, even as he tended to the body of Bretton, lying in a bank of white winter

snow, for the captain to remember a poem he had written many years before:

Sometimes I see the sun a burning Tree,
Its golden fruit swung bright in airless air,
Its apples wormed with man and gravity,
Their worship breathing from them everywhere,
As man sees Sun as burning Tree . . .

The captain sat for a long while by the body, feeling many separate things. I feel sad, he thought, and I feel good, and I feel like a boy coming home from school with a handful of dandelions.

" Well," said the captain, sitting, eyes shut, sighing. " Well, where do we go now, eh, where are we going? "

He felt his men sitting or standing all about him, the terror dead in them, their breathing quiet.

" When you've gone a long, long way down to the sun and touched it and lingered and jumped around and streaked away from it, where are you going then? When you go away from the heat and the noonday light and the laziness, where do you go? "

His men waited for him to say it out aloud. They waited for him to gather all the coolness and the whiteness and the welcome and refreshing climate of the word in his mind, and they saw him settle the word, like a bit of ice-cream, in his mouth, rolling it gently.

" There's only one direction in space from here on out," he said at last.

They waited. They waited as the ship moved swiftly into cold darkness away from the light.

" North," murmured the captain. " North."

And they all smiled, as if a wind had come up suddenly in the middle of a hot afternoon.

★ ★ ★

RULED OUT

Lady Randolph Churchill loved to tell anecdotes about Wilde. Her favourite story concerned a woman who once asked Wilde if it was true he could deliver a witty, extemporaneous speech on any conceivable subject. Wilde, who never ducked a conversational challenge, drew himself up to his full height.

" Quite true," he answered. " Give me a subject."

" Queen Victoria," the woman said, believing she had Wilde trapped. He wouldn't dare make irreverent cracks about Her Majesty.

" My dear lady," Wilde snapped, " the Queen is not a subject."

ELSA MAXWELL, *I Married the World*

CARNIVAL OF FEAR

Only the people who lived on the other side could tell her what she wanted to know

by KAY BOYLE

IT was a Sunday afternoon when the lady from Ohio came into West Berlin by plane, and it seemed to her that there was a look of peace on everything, a sabbatical calm no different to the eye from that which dwelt upon the streets and houses of home. This was her first trip out of America, out of Ohio even, and she set her embroidered silk handbag and her blue straw hat on the table in the hotel room, and with the palms of her capable housewife's hands she smoothed her pure white crown of hair upward from her temples and brow.

She was a small woman, with intent brown eyes, and at the opening of her flowered-silk dress showed a triangle of weathered skin. As she stood at the window and looked down into the streets, she seemed to be looking out upon a Cincinnati suburb on a Sunday afternoon, for serenity lay like a veil across the vastness of the ruins, as well as across the faces of the men and women walking.

Young trees had taken root in the rubble the bombing had left, and their delicate, leafy branches were outspread to mask the chaos, so that whatever had once taken place in violent uproar had been so long silent that the name of it could scarcely be recalled.

She had learnt little history, politics or geography, but this much she knew: that a line ran through the city outside the window, and that on one side of this line lay the Western sector, where the aerodrome was, and the hotel to which she had come, and on the other side of the line the Eastern sector lay.

At home, she and her husband had spread the map of this foreign city on the kitchen table or opened it on the back porch after supper when the days were long—she and the man in the denim overalls and collarless shirt, Mr. and Mrs. William Bedenbaugh, whose dairy farm lay two miles outside Lovetown, Ohio—and they had come to know the streets of West Berlin as well as they knew their own acres of land.

Here was the Tempelhof Aerodrome, here the Potsdamer Platz, and here the line that ran through the city, dividing east from west, a line become so actual to them that it seemed they could touch it with their hands.

"Maybe here, or here, or here it was that Bill went over," they would say to each other, not adding "by mistake," because there was no other explanation possible of why Bill had gone.

They would spread the map wide in the Ohio dusk and speak

sometimes in English, sometimes in German, to each other, for, since they were young, they had spoken German among their own people in Cincinnati. They would read the newspaper stories of refugees pouring from east to west, of young people leaving the old behind and crossing at peril of their lives, but only this one boy, whom the Army listed as missing in the Eastern sector, had any reality for them.

"Maybe he took this street," they would say as they studied the map by daylight in the summer evenings or under the kitchen lamp in the autumn and winter, and again by the light of evening when the second summer came round.

On the kitchen dresser stood Bill's photograph in a silver frame, a young man with his dark hair parted on one side, a corporal in the American Army of Occupation who was also their son. After ten months of looking into the picture's clear, unfaltering eyes, Mr. Bedenbaugh blamed only the Army for what had happened, and he said this in every letter he wrote to the authorities. Bill was only nineteen, he wrote, and, guard duty or no guard duty, the Army had no business letting him wander through a strange city at night alone.

And one evening, Mrs. Bedenbaugh said, "I'm going to Berlin to find him. I'll just stop people in the streets and ask them. You never know, William. Maybe one of them will have seen him somewhere."

From the window, the sky over Berlin was as grey as the stones of the pavement and the buildings, and the weight of sky and stone seemed to slow the pace of the Sunday walkers who moved down the avenue. These were the people of the west, and she knew it was only the men and women who lived beyond, on the other side, who could tell her what she wanted to know. To get to them, she did not need to open the map out. The way was as familiar as the lines in her own quick, efficient hand. She would follow Reichsstrasse as far as the Kaiserdamm, and there turn into Bismarck Strasse and the Charlottenburger, Chaussee.

As she ate supper in the hotel dining-room, a certain uneasiness had come upon her, and even fortified by food she could not bring herself to go. Instead, she stepped into the lift, and she looked at the uniformed boy at the controls as they rode upward—a boy of fifteen or sixteen, she thought, whose hair grew tender and dark at the back of his thin neck, as Bill's hair once had grown. His cap was set at an angle on his head, and he whistled a dance tune through his teeth.

"Have you ever been over on the eastern side?" she said to him in German.

"In the Eastern sector? I live there," said the boy. "I go home there every night."

"And nothing happens?" asked Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

"Nothing happens if your papers are in order," the boy said. They had come to the third floor now, and they balanced airily a

moment, as if suspended in space, before he slid open the door. " If anyone stops me, I show my working-papers. I'm not a refugee," he said.

" But if a soldier—you know, an American soldier—got over there and wanted to come back, what would happen to him? " asked Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

A light came silently alive in the framed glass indicator, marking the fifth floor. " I'll go up with you. I'm not in any hurry," she said, for this boy in his brass-buttoned suit was hope and promise to her now.

The man who got in at the fifth floor was blond and young, and so tall that he stooped to draw his height in.

" Here's a lady asking about going over to the Eastern sector," said the lift-boy, and he half turned from the controls with something like derision in his eye, as if she had brought the dust of the Midwestern fields and the artlessness of all Ohio into the lift with her.

" Nothing to see there. Nothing in the shops," said the blond man in a soft voice, as they dropped from floor to floor. " If I didn't have business there, I wouldn't go over every night."

"I was thinking of someone trying to get out," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

"They killed a friend of mine ten days ago, crossing the line," the blond man said, as the lift reached the ground floor. " A driver bringing his lorryload of vegetables out, the way he'd done it every week, but that night they'd put up a barricade, and there wasn't any light to show it was there."

The two others stood silent, listening, the boy waiting to hear the rest of it before opening the door. " Maybe my friend didn't see the barricade or maybe just seeing it got him mad," the blond man said, still speaking softly. " But, anyway, he drove the lorry right into it, and a border policeman drew his gun and shot him dead behind the wheel."

" Did he have a family? " said Mrs. Bedenbaugh suddenly seeing the driver of the truck as any man, any farmer driving from one place to another with his load.

" Yes; two children, a wife," said the blond man, looking at her in mild curiosity.

" At home, they don't kill you for politics," she said.

" I heard about an excursion boat that got through two days ago," said the lift-boy, and his voice was lowered now. " It had fourteen refugees and their families on it, and they'd stolen the boat and travelled two hundred miles on the Oder River before reaching the Spree. It seems there was a whole regiment of border police firing at them, but they got below deck and went full steam ahead, and they got through."

" More than a thousand a day come over in this kind of weather," said the blond man. " But they choose their hours and their places. There's a section behind Tempelhof, in the Neuköln district, where it's easy to slip through the bombed area."

He glanced at the watch on his wrist. " It's late," he said. " The curtain will be going up "—and the boy slid back the door.

" I was thinking particularly about an American soldier getting out," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh when they were alone again.

" Third floor? " said the lift-boy, his eye cocked at her under his cap. " What would an American soldier be doing over there? " he asked as the lift rose.

" Maybe he got lost and walked over by mistake," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, and she waited eagerly for him to speak.

" If he was in uniform, they'd lock him up," said the boy.

The door stood open at the third floor, but she made no move to go.

" This is your floor," he said, and Mrs. Bedenbaugh nodded.

" Yes, this is my floor," she said in a low voice, and she felt a great weariness in her heart and flesh as she went out of the door.

Now it was eight o'clock, and in these hours after sunset the long-established ritual of her life returned to plague her, for she had been less than a week away from the Midwestern soil. Now was the hour to feel the iron of the latch beneath her thumb, and to hear the last stirring of the cattle and horses as she closed the barn door in the summer dusk.

Once she had crossed the porch she would stop to watch, through the lighted window, the man in the denim overalls, who sat at the kitchen table with the lamplight turning to ivory the knuckles of his fingers as he spread out the map of Berlin.

On a night such as this, moth wings would whirr and quiver at the window screens at home, and she would brush out her soft white lengths of hair and braid it, as she braided it now in the strangeness of the hotel room.

" Other men have come back from the other side—business men, newspapermen. You read about them coming back," she said . . .

She awoke at half past four, roused from sleep by what she believed for a moment had been the crowing of the cocks at home, and she dressed at once, and put her hat on, and walked past the lifts and down the long flights of stairs.

She made for the waste land beyond the aerodrome, remembering the blond man's words of the lonely spaces between the sectors where those who watched must grow afraid of their own shadows, and turn their heads to let the fleeing people pass. Over a thousand refugees a day, she remembered him saying, and she believed that if she could find the area of their crossing, she would come one day upon Bill's face among the others or come upon men and women who had news of him.

Even at this early hour, the day was warm, and the streets were abandoned as she walked towards the east. And then, just before half past five, without any warning being given, she heard the chugging of a tractor, the staccato of its motor coming louder, as if it rocked towards her across the fields of home. For a moment, she could not tell which street it mounted, and then it swung around the corner and pulsed steadily forward in the early-morning light.

Mrs. Bedenbaugh stood on the pavement, watching the chugging, living thing advance between the mounds of rubble, and for one startling instant it seemed to her that it brought the sunrise with it, so garish were the colours that followed behind.

For in the tractor's wake came a circuslike trailer wagon, with its roof and shutters painted red, and behind this came a second trailer with a merry-go-round lashed to it, the white and the ebony wooden horses with forelegs lifted in arrested motion as if the music had just ceased playing or was just about to play. A third trailer followed this, piled high with crossbeams and rolled orange canvas awnings and plywood panels, stacked upright, on which tusked boar-heads had been painted, and long-tailed pheasants, and antlered deer-heads, and hunters with their guns.

So they're bringing a merry-go-round and a shooting-gallery over for a country fair, thought Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

The man who drove sat high on a springing iron saddle, his hands clinging for dear life to the agitated wheel. As he passed, she saw that his bare forearms were lashed with veins, and that his whole body shook with the palsy of the motor as the sound of it echoed, now loud, now muted, in the roofed-in cellars and against the varying heights of stone.

When he saw the woman in her flowered dress, his eyes went sharp with interest under the peak of his cap, and she thought for a moment that he might call out her name, as a neighbour would, but instead he raised one hand. Then came the circus wagon, with lace curtains at its windows, and at the rear of it geraniums bloomed along the railings of a little balcony, and a hanging bird-cage covered with a green baize cloth swung back and forth with the rocking of the caravan.

Before the circus wagon had quite passed, with the wooden horses in pursuit, a woman with thick auburn hair, cut short and brushed back from her ears and brow, came out on the balcony where the geraniums bloomed. Mrs. Bedenbaugh watched her, a woman of perhaps thirty, dressed in pink, who looked at the desolation around her in strange delight. She raised her white arms in her square-necked peasant dress, and she pulled the cover from the bird's swinging cage.

"Look, look!" the woman cried out in happiness to the bird, and she flung her arms out to the leaning, makeshift huts and the rubble that they passed. Then she saw Mrs. Bedenbaugh standing halted there, and she waved the green cloth at her, and, waving and smiling, she was borne on, as if drifting by on the deck of a river barge.

"Hullo! Good morning! How's everything over here?" she called out to Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

She waved the green cloth in celebration, and Mrs. Bedenbaugh waved almost shyly at her. Now the merry-go-round was passing by, and Mrs. Bedenbaugh saw that interspersed among the wooden horses were glossy, cream-coloured swans and miniature bicycles and racing-cars, all freshly painted.

" How far have you come? " Mrs. Bedenbaugh called out in her Ohio German.

" Oh, a long way—a long way! " the woman answered.

" If you've come a long way, then you must have seen a lot of people," called Mrs. Bedenbaugh as she followed.

" Oh, a lot of people! In every town we came through, a lot of people! " the woman answered, and Mrs. Bedenbaugh liked the look of her neat pink dress, and the apron, striped mauve and blue, tied at her waist, and the buoyancy of health in the woman's flesh and hair.

The tractor had reached a crossing, and, as the violent throbbing of the motor ceased, Mrs. Bedenbaugh, spry as a girl, crossed the cobbles of Roseggerstrasse to the trailer steps. There the auburn-haired woman leaned in her low-cut peasant dress and unlatched the gate for her, and, like a friend who had waited a long time for her to come, she took Mrs. Bedenbaugh's outstretched hand and helped her up the steps.

In this moment of intimacy, the bright, intent eyes of the older woman asked an urgent question of the younger woman's warm, dark, Slavic gaze.

" I was just going to make a cup of coffee," the woman said when the moment had passed. Her manner seemed almost tipsy, as if she were drunk with the knowledge that because she had crossed an imponderable line that cut through the rubble of a city, life would never again be the same.

But before she drew Mrs. Bedenbaugh in through the door, she opened the bird-cage and reached inside it, and the pale blue love-bird on the perch cocked its head and eyed the gold rings on her fingers before it edged towards the hollow of her hand.

" I've been saving the coffee for six months, so we could drink it today," said the woman, and the bird stepped with its wire-thin legs, its delicate feet, from perch to flesh, and its claws clasped the cushion of her forefinger and it balanced there. Once in the sitting-room, it fluttered from hand to shoulder, and there it stretched its soft-feathered neck to peck sharply at the soft lobe of her ear.

" I've been waiting to light the fire until we got across," said the woman, standing there in a room so agreeably furnished that Mrs. Bedenbaugh would have liked to have it for her own. " Siegfried thought the smoke coming out of the chimney might remind them we were there. We waited until it began to get light, and then Siegfried got the tractor going." She spoke in hushed excitement, so that, as the wheels of the caravan began to turn again, it seemed the very instant of their crossing was occurring now.

" I stopped my ears with my fingers so as not to hear the noise the motor made. It had never sounded so loud before. We've been waiting two years for the right time to get over. You're the first person we've seen since we got to the west," she said.

" I hear there's shooting sometimes when people come across," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said. As she sat down, she looked with pleasure at the hand-work on the chair back.

" Yes, but Siegfried's clever. He stopped just short of the border," said the woman, " and when the police passed last night, he told them we were setting the merry-go-round and the shooting-gallery up this morning. He told them we'd stay a week if business was good," she said, and then she began to laugh. " They'll be waiting all day to hear the music! "

The two women laughed, and the love-bird flew from the German woman's shoulder to a vase of daisies on the table set against the wall between the windows. Everything in the narrow, oblong room had its proper place: two armchairs, a sofa, two dining-chairs, the folding-table, fitted together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and beside the door that gave onto the porch, a clean little cooking-stove stood high on four curved metal legs. At the other end, a china cupboard filled the space between the lace edge of a window curtain and the varnished wood of a closed door.

" That's our bedroom," said the woman, following Mrs. Bedenbaugh's eyes, and with the hook of the poker she lifted the polished iron lid from the stove. " I just have to set a match to it. I laid it while we waited last night. I couldn't sleep," she said, and she struck the match across the iron. " I like your accent," she went on. " It's different from the accent over there."

" Well, I brought it from America with me," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, speaking with modesty.

" America! " said the woman, and she swung quickly round, forgetting the match she held, and it dropped from her fingers to the floor.

" I've just come from America. I got here, yesterday. I came to find my son," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, and as she said these words she felt the tears rise in her throat. " I feel we understand each other, you and I, so I can talk to you," she said, and her voice was shaking in her mouth. " I came over here to find my son. I won't go home until I do."

" America! " the woman said again. " You come from America. That's where we want to go," she said.

" My son was new to the Army," Mrs. Bedenbaugh went on. " Maybe they shouldn't have given him so much responsibility. He was never good at knowing his way. Mr. Bedenbaugh kept writing the Army officers that after Bill disappeared—he and another soldier on duty with him. The Army protested to the Soviet sector police, but they never had any explanation from them."

The flames were winging up the silvered pipe now, and the woman turned back from the stove.

" I have a photograph of Bill here in my bag. I wanted you to look at it," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

The woman took the photograph from Mrs. Bedenbaugh's hand, and for a moment nothing happened to her face as she studied it, and then she slowly raised her eyes, and she gave the American woman a deep, strange, lingering look.

" I don't want to say until I'm sure. I want to ask my husband if he thinks he's the same one," she said.

" You mean you saw him—you think you saw him? " whispered Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

" I don't know. I can't be sure. If it was the same one, it was yesterday, in the evening, on the other side," the woman said, and she looked again, for a long moment, at the features of the boy's untroubled face. Then she returned the photograph in silence to Mrs. Bedenbaugh, and she leaned to shovel the eggs of compressed coal into the stove.

" Was he wearing his uniform still? " Mrs. Bedenbaugh asked, and her hands held on to the arms of the chair.

" He was wearing grey things, he and another man, both dressed alike, something like prisoners' clothes," said the woman, and now the rattling of the coal was done, and the iron lid slipped in place. " I noticed him because he looked so young and tired. The other one, I couldn't say what his face was like."

From the shallow cupboard behind the stove she lifted a tall tin jug, and she filled a saucepan half full with water from it, and she set the jug down and placed the saucepan over the flame.

" It was like this," she said, " Siegfried had been putting water in the tractor, and I was standing on the platform out there pinching dead leaves off the geranium plants, not daring to think of anything because we still had to go ten kilometres before the border. And these two young men were drinking from the fountain. I wanted to give them a piece of bread, something to eat, because they looked as if they needed it, but that wasn't anything unusual, because a lot of people are hungry over there.

" The last I saw of them, they were walking across the Platz," she said, her dark, pondering gaze seeking to fix in space the time, the place, the incident—

" Then I saw the police were with them—"

" The police! " said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, and her heart struck hard and swiftly in her breast.

" That wouldn't mean anything," the woman said. " Over there the police are everywhere. But I didn't want them to start asking me questions—the police—so I didn't get down and talk to the young men.

" Siegfried got back on the tractor, and we started, and I came inside and closed the door. But I could still see them through the window, walking across the Platz with the police, with their bundles of what was maybe everything they owned."

The door opened from the porch, and the man came into the room. He looked at the two women with alert, quick eyes before he closed the door.

" Ah, Siegfried! " the woman cried out in unfeigned tenderness, and at once the love-bird spread its pale wings and flew to him, coming to rest on the dark, checked cap he pushed up off his brow. " We have a visitor, Siegfried! She's from America! We're going to have a cup of coffee when the water boils."

Because of the love-bird sitting on his head the man did not take

his cap off to greet Mrs. Bedenbaugh, but he made an explanatory gesture towards the bird with both hands spread out.

" I'm going to wash and put a clean shirt on," he said, but still he waited, either looking with gentleness at Mrs. Bedenbaugh's face and her soft white hair, or looking gently beyond it to something between motive and dream that he had carried a long time in his heart.

" We're on our way to America. Maybe Fini told you. Maybe we could talk to you about the best place for us to go. We've always wanted to go to America, and now we're on our way," Siegfried said.

" When you get over there, you look us up," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh. " We've got a tractor of our own, and when my husband comes in from a day's work his hands look just about the same as yours look now."

And in the same quiet, friendly voice, in the same Ohio German, she went on, " Maybe, before you wash, you'd take a look at this photograph, and tell me if you've seen this young man anywhere."

" Wait, Siegfried, wait! Look carefully before you answer! " the woman called Fini cried out, her hands busy with the saucepan of boiling water and the coffee-pot behind him at the stove.

When the man leaned over to scrutinize the photograph in Mrs. Bedenbaugh's hand, the bird dropped, light as a flower petal, from his head to the arm of her chair. Then there was a long moment of waiting.

I can't wait any longer, I've waited too long for even an echo of news of him, thought Mrs. Bedenbaugh, but her hand with the photograph in it did not falter.

" Well, yes, I've seen him," the man said at last, and he straightened up. " It was yesterday, maybe ten kilometres back, on the other side. He doesn't look as young as that any more, and he's thinner, but it's the same face," he said.

Then he walked off so abruptly that it seemed the conversation was done, but before Mrs. Bedenbaugh had put the photograph away, he was back again, his cap gone now, and his dark hands clean, and he drew out a chair from the table against the wall, and he sat down facing her.

" I was putting water in the radiator," he said, " taking it out of a fountain in the middle of the Platz. This man here, and another man, they were taking a drink, drinking out of their hands, drinking deeply, like horses, as if they'd come a long, hard way. I asked them where they'd come from and where they were going and then the guards who were watching them came over and told them to pick up their bundles and get moving. I hadn't noticed the guards before. They were having a drink of beer in the shade."

" What did he say to you? Did he have time to answer you? " Mrs. Bedenbaugh asked in a low voice.

" He said his friend didn't speak any German. He said that before he said anything else," said Siegfried. " Then he told me they'd been in Potsdam, in prison there. They'd put them to work

at clearing rubble now, he told me: I didn't hang around to hear any more. I didn't want the police to start on me."

" That was her son. That man was her son," said Fini, and her eyes were wet as she set the cups out on the table.

" He couldn't have known that," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

It was six-thirty then, and they sat at the table and ate wedges of brown bread dipped in coffee to soften it, with no butter or milk or sugar served, and no butter or milk or sugar spoken of, for there were other things to say.

" When we get to America, we're going to start working for a roller-coaster," Siegfried said. " A merry-go-round and a shooting-gallery, they'll keep things going from hand to mouth, but a roller-coaster, it takes you out of the one-tractor class. It means you hire a man to work for you, and it opens the way for a Tunnel of Love," he added, with a bit of bread big in his cheek.

" With a Tunnel of Love, you're fixed for life," said Fini.

" Ohio's the place for you folks," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, trying to put the thought of Bill aside and see their life there. " People are family people where we live. They like dressing up on Saturday nights and taking their children out with them. You'd be making money the first week you started work, and Mr. Bedenbaugh would fix things up at the bank for you.

" And Bill, he was always handy with anything mechanical. He'd drive the second tractor for you when you went on the road!" she said, and then the sound of her voice ceased, shocked into silence by this absurdity.

" We're parked outside a refugee camp now," Siegfried said. " At eight, we'll go in and show our papers, Fini and I, and we'll tell them where we've come from and where we want to go. There'll be a lot of refugees waiting in there, maybe some who came across last night, so take the photograph with you and come too. Maybe somebody else will have seen Bill and his friend, and talked to them the way I did."

But even when he had drunk his coffee, he did not move from the table, but he sat there, looking straight ahead. Then he opened the table drawer, took a piece of paper out, and began to draw.

" I want to make you a picture of the way things are," he said. " This is the frontier. There are a few trees here and here," he said, his pencil moving, " and between this point and Hoppegarten there's been a lot of bombing, so they've got men working there. No one passes unless he knows the exit routes. I studied them for two years before I tried it. That's where Bill is. That's just about where we saw him this time yesterday," he said, and he shaded a small area in.

" We'll have to go and tell the Army people that. You must go with me to Tempelhof and tell them you saw both of them," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

" Yes, we'll go. We'll tell them," said Siegfried, but his face was filled with other conjecturings.

By eight they had shown Mrs. Bedenbaugh the bedroom that lay behind the other door, with the bed, covered by a counterpane of azure artificial silk, nearly filling the cramped space of the room, and two boudoir dolls in ruffled skirts and satin hats sitting, as if on the bed of a Hollywood star, against the varnished panels of the wall. Mrs. Bedenbaugh had washed her hands in the flowered porcelain basin, and straightened her hat before the glass, and while Siegfried shaved, Fini slid back a panel in the bedroom wall and took his black suit out.

It was a suit that had been his father's once, and his father's father's before that, she said as she lifted it out from among her dresses, some trimmed with tinsel and others edged with strips of fur, and the colours of them as gaudy as a bareback rider's costumes. The black of the suit was rusty, and the broadcloth threadbare now, but it was formal enough for a wedding, or a funeral, and it must have been only for such occasions that it had served.

" Mr. Bedenbaugh, too, has a suit we always keep for best," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said in approval, and she took the suit on its hanger from Fini's work-worn hand. " I'll attend to this while you get his other things out," she said, as if speaking to a daughter, and she reached for the clothes-brush that hung, with a shoehorn and a buttonhook, beside the door. " There's years of wear in it still," she said, and now the lives of these people seemed singularly bound to her life, and it might have been the suit of one of her own men that she brushed with scrupulous care.

" It's like being given the chance to be born again, so we have to dress up for it," said Fini, and she laid a white shirt for Siegfried, and a broad black tie and a pair of black socks, on the bed.

" Put on your wedding-dress, Fini," he said as their eyes met in the glass.

" Oh, it isn't the time of day or the place for that! " said Fini, but she took the dress from the wardrobe and held it for Mrs. Bedenbaugh to see. It was oyster-white, with wrist-length sleeves and high neck, and the bodice was minutely tucked.

" Nothing's too good when life's starting again," said Siegfried.

Then the three of them went down the steps of the back porch, Mrs. Bedenbaugh in her flowered dress walking between the re-generated figures of the bridegroom and his bride. It seemed a gutted, long-abandoned factory towards which they walked. But once they had passed through the arch of the door and crossed the vacant entrance hall, the presence of people, crowded together and feverishly engrossed, was tensely there.

" Why do they all come here? Where will they go? " Mrs. Bedenbaugh asked in a whisper, but no voice answered from the absorbed and toiling throng. Thousands and thousands must be here, she thought, for one room opened into another, seemingly without end, and each room stirred with the same dense, muted activity.

" How long will they stay here? " she asked in her bewilderment. " What are they waiting for? "

" Perhaps to be recognized as refugees," whispered Fini. " Perhaps on this side, too, you haven't any identity until you fill in official papers."

But even the man in the little office at the end of the hall could not give the answers.

This was merely a camp where a fraction of the Eastern-zone refugees slept, and cooked their meals in the communal kitchen, and washed their clothes, and waited, he said, when the three of them stood before his desk.

Little by little, as the weeks passed, he said, they would go on, while, little by little, others took their place. But with over eighty camps like this in West Berlin, and fifty thousand people waiting in them, there was a limit, he said, as to how fast the processing could go.

" Here in my camp there's no room for any more. You'll have to try the next camp," he said, speaking patiently to them, either because of the vulnerability of Fini's face or the white of Mrs. Bedenbaugh's hair.

" We've got four thousand housed here now. We're one of the largest," the story went on, but if it was one man's voice that told it, or the mingled voices of many men and women, Mrs. Bedenbaugh did not know.

" Sixteen hundred came through last night, some of them sick, and we had to tell them to go on," he said, and the words seemed to echo out of silence.

And behind, in the rooms, the arms scrubbed endlessly, tirelessly, at the asphalt of the floor. When one set of arms was done, another set took over, so that no epidemic of fear or pestilence would wipe out the tired or aged or take the children away.

" People will walk out of a cinema where they've been sitting watching a film, afraid to go home because the word's been passed from mouth to mouth that danger is closing in on them, and they'll leave like that, and cross the border empty-handed, and we have to give them what we can when they get here."

" We don't need living-quarters. We don't need anything except new papers. We've got our caravan outside," said Siegfried. " We're luckier than the others. We've got our means of living with us, a merry-go-round and a shooting-gallery, and a house to live in."

" If you've got a carnival," said the man, " that isn't lucky. Papers aren't easy to get, but if the processing centre judges you political refugees, you'll be flown out of Berlin. You have to fly. There's no other way to go."

" And the carnival can't be flown? " said Siegfried, his face grave.

" The carnival can't be flown. You can understand that," the man said. " And it can't be shipped by rail. It wouldn't get past the Russian check-point as long as it's owned by refugees."

" The carnival's everything we have," said Fini.

" On the other side, they decided against its being professional

equipment. They were going to confiscate it," Siegfried said, " my number was got out. We're going to America, and the carnival has to go with us, so we can make our living there."

" If they accept you, you can put it up for sale," the man said, his voice gone a little impatient now.

" But we're partners in business, these people and me," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, her lips puckered tight, her eye gone shrewd. " I'm American, and Americans can ship their goods out, can't they? I can take the carnival home with me."

" You're American? " the man said, looking up.

" I just flew over from America to find my son," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said, but even as she spoke the words she felt a sense of shame rise in her heart. And what of all of them here in the factory rooms, she thought, all of them with no country to mourn them when they leave, and no country to hold out its arms in welcome to them when they reach the destination of these ruined walls?

" He was seen just yesterday on the other side. Maybe he came here," she said, and she took the photograph from her bag, knowing in grief that the face of one more young man petitioning for space in the crowded halls of liberty was nothing to anyone who had seen the endless streams of men and women and their children pass.

" If an American soldier got across," said the man, " he wouldn't come to a refugee camp. He'd report to Army Headquarters."

" Unless he'd forgotten who he was," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said. " I've read about that. I've heard they forget their names sometimes, and their pasts, and their nationality."

By noon they had tried three more camps, and there was no room for them, and each had sent them on to the next. But at the fourth one Siegfried made his own decision, and he halted the caravan within the spacious precincts of the place. It was not a factory this time, but a parallelogram of broken buildings, destroyed except for a single storey, and these ruins enclosed an area that might have been, in another epoch of the city's life, an open market-place.

Overflowing water-troughs stood along one end of this vast court, with pipes spouting constant streams of water. People were crowded at the troughs, washing their clothes or their dishes there and mothers washed their naked children under the cold, flashing streams, and young girls washed their hair.

" Here is where we will stay," Siegfried said, and his resolution gave courage to the two women, who had begun to prepare a meal of potatoes and cabbage on the tall-legged stove. Once he had laid his good black suit aside, and turned his shirt-sleeves up, he set to loosening the ropes by which the cream-coloured wooden swans and the miniature bicycles and the racing cars were bound. *This is freedom*, he did not say aloud, but the vigour of his arms as he jerked the ropes clear said louder than any spoken tongue that the meaning of their escape was not to be obscured.

" We'll get to the processing centre when our turn comes," he said, his thin, dark jaw set as he worked, " but while we're waiting, we'll be free."

This is freedom, the freedom to own a carnival, to set up a shooting-gallery, to let the music play, he did not say as he unlashed the black-and-white horses with their lifted forelegs, and pulled the tarpaulin from the painted organ pipes, but his furious energy declared without equivocation that freedom must be given a shape with one's own hands if it failed to emerge as the thing that it had promised to be.

" We'll stay here where we are until we can get to the processing centre," Siegfried said as he ate, " and if we stay a week, or a month, or six months, we'll go to the other refugee camps, all eighty of them, and we'll show Bill's photograph to every man and woman who comes across. And in the end we'll get him out.

" We'll get the merry-go-round going for the children," he said as he went through the door. " We'll get the shooting-gallery up." And at the sight of him, the children came from the water-troughs, and came through the doors of the broken buildings, pressing closer, closer, asking no questions, but crowding close to see the things that he would do.

The skirts of the little girls' dresses were faded, Mrs. Bedenbaugh saw as she dried the dishes by the porch door, and flax-white braids hung across their shoulders, or braids were pinned in crowns around their heads, and some carried babies in their arms, and some had younger children clinging to their hands. Whatever their age, the boys wore *Lederhosen*, and under the broad, decorated leather braces, their torsos were thin and brown and bare.

" You can help me with these," Siegfried called out, and his dark hand beckoned to the older boys, and they came forward, their faces suddenly alive to the promise of individual recognition that he made.

" Get hold of these," he said to the boys, and together they lifted carefully from the trailer the plywood panels on which were rendered the life-size portraits of bear and pheasant, hunter and deer. And closer, closer, pressed the children, so close that their breath seemed to stir the scarlet tassels at the horses' cheek-straps.

" This is the backdrop. The clay ducks and pipes go into motion before this," he said, and the boys held upright the vision of a forest as it might have been in the twilight of dawn or evening, hushed for the steps of wild, fleet things, its silence deep and vaporous and green.

" Give me a hand here. We want to get the side panels hooked on," Siegfried said, and other boys stepped out of the ever-growing throng of children to help him with these things he had to do.

When the dishes were done, the two women went into the bedroom again, and, from under the bed, Fini pulled a box of favours, they sat on the blue silk coverlet and she took out the gilt-starred fans, and the flounced paper parasols that little girls might carry, and the paper-winged butterflies on sticks, and the plastic whistles for little boys to blow.

" These are the prizes we give them for shooting well, shooting the clay pipes or the pigeons," Fini said.

She selected from the box two paper flowers, red roses with stems of emerald wire, and she stood before the mirror and arranged them in her hair.

" If you hit the bull's-eye, you get something better," she went on. " You get a paperweight with a view of Moscow or of East Berlin under the glass. We'll have to change the views before we use them here. We'll go out and help Siegfried run the carnival. But you can't do it with a hat on. You have to make yourself look gay."

She took two clusters of paper lilacs from the box of favours, and as she straightened the covered wire of their stems, she said, " Do women put flowers in their hair in Ohio? In Ohio, do women dress anything like me? "

" You dress in your own way. I like it. I'd like to learn how to make my clothes explain the things I can't express," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said, and she took her hat off, and their eyes met in singular commitment to each other as Fini leaned to pin the lilacs in her hair.

They went down the caravan steps together, and into the sunlight of the shattered market-place, and the children closed around them like a tide. The shooting-gallery was up, and the clay pigeons and clay pipes moved in a double row before the dark trees of the forest, and Fini made her way to it.

She carried the box of favours with her, and, once behind the counter, she took out the parasols, and the butterflies with their dazzling wings, and the fans, and the green-stemmed paper flowers, and hung them in promise around the likenesses of animals painted on the wood.

" Everything's free today," Siegfried said to the boys who had worked with him. " Here are the guns. The lady behind the counter will load them for you. There are prizes for all," he said, and he plucked a paper tea rose with a silver stem out of the box of favours and stuck it behind his ear, and he halted the merry-go-round long enough to let the children mount the horses and swans and to climb to the bicycles and racing-cars. And then he pulled the rope that clanged the bell, and the platform revolved again, and the organ gasped its music out.

Mrs. Bedenbaugh stood holding the hands of the younger children who waited, and when the merry-go-round ceased to turn, she lifted them up on the seats, or the saddles, or the backs of the swans, and buckled the worn leather straps around them and put the reins in their hands. And Bill was like this once, she thought, holding on to them as they waited for their turns to come.

There were some who could have been no more than two whom their sisters abandoned to her when they rode the painted horses, and they watched her face in infinite hope, in infinite confidence. When she lifted them up to see the others riding past, their small hands clutched the lilacs in her hair.

Beyond, at the shooting-booth, the older boys raised the rifles to their shoulders, and, at the " ping " of their shot, they looked back laughing at those who stood behind. And that was exactly

like Bill, Mrs. Bedenbaugh thought as she looked across the sunlight at them. I've seen that same look in Bill's eyes.

And then the younger ones called out to her, and she hastened onto the halted platform to unstrap them, and, hour after hour, as she held them in her arms, the sense of her bereavement struck ever more deeply and more cruelly in her heart.

I have been offered these things in recompense, she thought, and her blood was halted by the dread that this was how it would end. These eyes, these voices, this laughter just like his. I have been offered these hands with their tender bones in fair exchange. They have been given me in compensation because Bill can't get back, there's no way for him to get back, and no way to reach him there.

" I want the blue bicycle this time, the blue bicycle! " Willi, or Hansi, or Dieter cried out, or: " I want to get on a horse, a white horse that goes up and down! "

And, one after another, working quickly before the music would begin, she lifted them in her slender girlish arms, holding them close against her as she strapped them on. But how do I know if I have courage enough, or if I have learnt to love enough, to accept this in exchange for him, she thought, no longer hearing their myriad voices, but only the lonely voice of one boy calling from childhood to her down the long corridor of time.

When the afternoon was nearly done, the parents came out of the buildings for their children, and when there was no more than a handful of them left, Siegfried halted the merry-go-round with singular finality, and, in the beginning of the evening, he pulled the corrugated-tin shutter of the shooting-gallery down. Then the three of them went back to the caravan together, and up the steps in silence, and a sense of doom was on them, as if, now that the music had ceased to play, they must face reality at last.

" The camp officer says one afternoon of this is enough. He doesn't want all this rumpus in a refugee camp," said Siegfried. " He came out and spoke to me an hour ago. Nobody but the children likes the hullabaloo, he told me. The older people have too much on their minds. He'll see we get to the processing centre this week, so that we move on quicker than the others."

" I'll make us something cool for supper," said Fini.

" Then make it quickly, before I go," said Siegfried, and he sat down at the table and took a clean white square of paper and a bottle of ink and a pen from the deep drawer.

" Go where? "

But Siegfried did not answer. " What is your first name? " he said, and he looked across the table at Mrs. Bedenbaugh.

" Freda," she said in a low voice. " My name is Freda," and her heart was shaking, knowing already what he was about to do.

Then he began to write the words with care across the table:

I, Siegfried Mahler, do hereby transfer all my worldly goods, consisting of a tractor, a caravan wagon, two flat trailers on which are carried a merry-go-round and a shooting-gallery, and all the furnishings and equipment pertaining to these, to my partner,

Mrs. Freda Bedenbaugh, of Lovetown, Ohio, with whom I shall engage in business, once my wife, Fini Mahler, and I have emigrated to the United States . . .

" If I'm delayed, you can use this when the time comes," he said, looking up from the paper. " If I do get back, everything in it is still true."

" Go where? " said Fini again. She dropped her hand on his shoulder. And then suddenly, as if not needing to read the words written out, she whispered, " Ah no! Ah no, ah no! "

Siegfried went that night, and for three bleak days they waited, and in the evening of the third day, the camp officer sent a message across the courtyard to the caravan that Fini and Siegfried Mahler were to report to the processing centre the next morning at eight.

" What are we going to do? " said Fini, speaking scarcely aloud. " What are we going to do? Tell them he forgot something over there on the other side, and went back for it? Tell them that and expect them to believe it, or expect anyone, living or dead, to believe that's what he did for a man he saw for five minutes once!

" Tell them that," she said, and her mouth was twisted as if with crying. " Tell them Siegfried Mahler doesn't exist any more as Siegfried Mahler! Tell them he's just one more man in a grey suit, picking up rubble, with a little bundle beside him of everything he owns! "

" We'll go together," Mrs. Bedenbaugh said. " They'll listen to me."

" Then tell them Siegfried Mahler committed suicide! " Fini cried out, and her hands were fiercely clenched at her sides. " I think until now I believed he would come back; I believed it until this paper came, like a death notice printed out! Siegfried Mahler doesn't exist any more! Do you hear me? He was somebody who owned a carnival once, and now there's only the carnival left."

" Siegfried Mahler doesn't exist any more," she said quietly to the three men of the screening-committee the next morning, standing there like a dead woman, with no colour in her cheeks or mouth. " I was his wife, and without him I'm nothing."

" Siegfried Mahler, carnival-owner," one of the three men read from the record, paying no heed to what she said. " You are a couple, husband and wife, so you must be screened together. We cannot take you separately."

" You will have to imagine him," Fini said, her eyes a little wild now as she looked at their faces. " He went back to the east four days ago. He had some forgotten business there."

" But we must see Siegfried Mahler himself! " another member of the committee cried out in impatience. " We have no time to waste here! There are fifteen hundred waiting for processing today! "

" He's back in the east, in the zone," said Fini. " As long as he can't speak for himself, we have to speak for him, this lady and me.

This lady," she said, her voice gone tight and fierce with pain, "her son is over there, an American soldier, a prisoner, and Siegfried went back to get him out. I wish she had never come to Germany, I wish she had never laid eyes on the caravan," she said.

"I am his partner," said Mrs. Bedenbaugh, and she took the square of paper from her bag and opened it out upon the table. "I am American. I am going to take these people and the caravan back home with me."

"That is his last will and testament!" Fini cried out. "That is the paper he wrote before he took his own life!"

"An American soldier a prisoner over there?" said the third member of the committee, and he picked up the paper written in Siegfried's hand and studied it a moment. "And your name is Bedenbaugh?" he said, and then he reached in the pocket of his coat.

"This is the morning paper. Perhaps you haven't seen it yet," he said as he opened it wide, seeking its page for the story. "I'll read it to you," he said, when he had found it.

"EAST ZONE REFUGEE WOUNDED WHILE BRINGING TWO AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO SAFETY," went the headline, and his voice continued: "Two United States soldiers who had been held for over ten months in the Soviet zone were brought to West Berlin last night by an East-zone refugee who, having already made good his escape, returned to get the two soldiers out. Cpl. William Bedenbaugh and Pvt. John Harrison, of Lovetown, Ohio, and Albany, New York, were under a doctor's care today, while the refugee who brought them out was operated on for wounds suffered when a frontier guard flung a hand grenade after the three fleeing men.

"The two Americans, who were manœuvring their way through the barbed-wire entanglement under cover of darkness when the hand grenade felled their German rescuer, managed to drag him through the wires to freedom. The condition of the East-zone refugee, whose name is being withheld for fear of possible retaliation upon members of his family in the East zone, was described at the hospital last night as 'good.'

"Bedenbaugh and Harrison, both underweight and suffering from exhaustion, told reporters in a thirty-minute interview how they had fallen into Soviet hands nearly a year before. The two men, who had been on guard duty at Tempelhof Airfield on September 14, 1952, had completed their mission at midnight and waited for over two hours for transport back to their outfit, and had finally decided to take a train. The two soldiers were new to Berlin, and had missed their station, and on leaving the train were arrested by East German police, and subsequently turned over to Soviet Army authorities.

"Bedenbaugh said today they had been offered money, good jobs, fine living-quarters and even university educations, if they would turn communist and agree to broadcast on the Soviet-zone radio. 'We were kept in separate rooms in a stockade in Karlshorst,' Bedenbaugh said, 'and they made us big promises. After

we told them it didn't matter what they offered us, we were put in solitary confinement in Potsdam. A few weeks ago they started taking us to various bombed-out areas, where we were put to work picking up and sorting out rubble with other prisoners. We were temporarily separated from the others, working in a cellar, when our German friend succeeded in getting us out.' "

And "Hush," whispered Mrs. Bedenbaugh, to Fini's crying, and their arms held fast to each other as if neither could ever let the other go.

"We must dry our eyes, we must get to the hospital quickly," she said, and the three men of the committee, to whom the fate of one lost man could be nothing when the agglomerate fate of a nation was their concern, stood up and shook the women's hands.

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ANSWERS to LET'S GO!
on page 18

1. *Brighton, where the Forsters rashly took Lydia Bennet, in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice."*
2. *Samarkand, in James Elroy Flecker's poem, "The Golden Journey to Samarkand."*
3. *Round about the earth, with Puck, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by William Shakespeare.*
4. *The hills of Chankly Bore, in Edward Lear's poem, "The Jumblies."*
5. *The Lake Isle of Innisfree, in the poem of that title by W. B. Yeats.*
6. *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea, on Captain Nemo's submarine apparatus, in Jules Verne's novel.*
7. *Grantchester, in "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester," by Rupert Brooke.*
8. *Treasure Island, in R. L. Stevenson's novel of the same title.*

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Marsupial.* 9, *Gallup.* 10, *Roast duck.* 11, *Rapier.* 12, *Takes a tip.* 13, *Clutch.* 17, *Oat.* 19, *Quarter to eleven.* 20, *Bit.* 21, *Anvils.* 25, *Callipers.* 26, *Inners.* 27, *Ninepenny.* 28, *Euston.* 29, *Intersect.*

Down. 2, *Aromas.* 3, *Sister.* 4, *Pedlar.* 5, *Acclimatization.* 6, *Parallels.* 7, *Plaintive.* 8, *Apprehend.* 14, *Equalizer.* 15, *Calvinist.* 16, *Still-room.* 17, *Orb.* 18, *Tot.* 22, *Sleeve.* 23, *Uppers.* 24, *Irenic.*

STOLEN KISSES

A legal kiss is never as good as a stolen one

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

He flung round with an oath. "You little fool! Do you know so little of me yet? Do you think that I will let anything stand between me and what I want? Do you think that by running away from me you will make me want you less? By Allah! I would have found you if you had got as far as France. What I have I keep, until I tire of it—and I have not tired of you yet." He jerked her to him, staring down at her passionately, and for a moment his face was the face of a devil. "How shall I punish you?" He felt the shudder he expected go through her and laughed as she shrank in his arms and hid her face. He forced her head up with merciless fingers. "What do you hate most?—my kisses?" and with another mocking laugh he crushed his mouth to hers in a long suffocating embrace.

E. M. HULL, *The Sheik*

Thoughtful

"I saw you take his kiss!" "'Tis true."
"O, modesty!" "'Twas strictly kept:
He thought me asleep; at least, I knew
He thought I thought he thought I slept."

COVENTRY PATMORE

Surprise Tactics

All this time she avoided my eye. In a moment we should be talking soberly like two old acquaintances. I wasn't going to allow this. I looked at her, and amid the enchanting chaos of silks and animals and improbable objects that seemed to rise almost to her waist she looked like a very wise mermaid rising out of a motley coloured sea: but in a moment she would have escaped me. The strangeness of the whole day was suddenly present to me with a kind of impetus; and immediately I had an idea. In the old days the living-room of Anna's Bayswater flat had been so surrounded by other windows that there was only

one corner of the room; low down on the floor, which was not overlooked. So if I wanted to kiss Anna this was the only place where I could do it. At that time too I had, in a not entirely disinterested fashion, been teaching Anna some Judo, and one of our customs had been that when I came in I would seize her and throw her down into this corner to be kissed. The memory of this rose in me now like an inspiration and I advanced upon her. I took her wrist, and for an instant saw her eyes wide with alarm, very close to mine, and then in a moment I had thrown her, very carefully, onto a pile of velvet costumes in the corner of the room. My knee sank into the velvet beside her, and straightaway a mass of scarves, laces, tin trumpets, woolly dogs, fancy hats and other objects came cascading down on top of us until we were half buried. I kissed Anna.

IRIS MURDOCH, *Under the Net*

Fair Exchange

My love and I for kisses play'd;
She would keep stakes, I was content;
But when I won she would be paid,
This made me ask her what she meant;
Nay, since I see (quoth she) you wrangle in vain,
Take your own kisses, give me mine again.

WILLIAM STRODE, *c.* 1640

Interrupted Idyll

They had continued therefore for sometime conversing in this manner on the character of Richard the 3d, which he was warmly defending when he suddenly seized hold of her hand, and exclaiming with great emotion, "Upon my honour you are entirely mistaken," pressed it passionately to his lips, and ran out of the arbour. Astonished at this behaviour, for which she was wholly unable to account, she continued for a few Moments motionless on the seat where he had left her, and was then on the point of following him up the narrow walk through which he had passed, when on looking up the one that lay immediately before the arbour, she saw her aunt walking towards her with more than her usual quickness. This explained at once the reason of his leaving her, but his leaving her in such a Manner was rendered still more inexplicable by it.

JANE AUSTEN, *Catharine*

Soft Questions

" But won't you answer my question? " he said, lowering his voice still more.

" I don't know what question you mean."

" Yes, you do. Of course you do. I mean the question of your marrying me."

" No, I shan't answer that question," she said flatly.

" Won't you? " The queer, young laugh came on his nose again. " Is it because I'm like the fox? Is that why? " And still he laughed.

She turned and looked at him with a long, slow look.

" I wouldn't let that put you against me," he said. " Let me turn the lamp low, and come and sit down a minute."

He put his red hand under the glow of the lamp, and suddenly made the light very dim. March stood there in the dimness quite shadowy, but unmoving. He rose silently to his feet, on his long legs. And now his voice was extraordinarily soft and suggestive, hardly audible.

" You'll stay a moment," he said. " Just a moment." And he put his hand on her shoulder. She turned her face from him. " I'm sure you don't really think I'm like the fox," he said, with the same softness and with a suggestion of laughter in his tone, a subtle mockery. " Do you now? " And he drew her gently towards him and kissed her neck, softly.

She winced and trembled and hung away. But his strong, young arm held her, and he kissed her softly again, still on the neck, for her face was averted.

" Won't you answer my question? Won't you now? " came his soft, lingering voice. He was trying to draw near to kiss her face. And he kissed her cheek softly, near the ear.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *The Fox*

Practice Makes Perfect

The first kiss tickles
The second teases
And after that
Every kiss pleases.

The first love tells
And the second teaches
And after that
Exquisite each is!

KENNETH HOPKINS, *Experience*

ENTER THE DRIMBLES

Where they came from and who they were we could only guess

by BRIAN ST. GEORGE

WHEN the Drimbles' luggage arrived, we, the permanent residents, were drinking our gin and bitters in the palm lounge. It came up from the harbour in a bullock-cart, and was deposited in a stack inside the entrance hall of the hotel.

The European community in Colombo in those days was small and the corps d'élite of society, who resided permanently at the Hotel Miramare, was a small entity within it. To an outside observer we must have seemed the best of friends. We opened doors politely for each other, we were careful to notice and congratulate each other on new hats, new suits, and new dresses, and we knew each other's tastes in everything from books to breakfast foods.

When the big ships dropped anchor for a few hours in the harbour on their way to and from Australia and disgorged their quota of chattering sightseers, we edged our tables closer together and faced the intruders with a consolidated front of stern and unruffled disapproval. Yet, despite this apparent harmony, the last spark of genuine interest had been extinguished for years and, in fact, we found each other insufferably dull.

But we were comfortable and secure in our drab little lives, and when we heard, as we occasionally did, from our relations at home, we were reminded that to them we were, in a vague, misguided way, rather glamorous figures, people who kept the flag flying in an intolerable climate, tough survivors of the old days when men were men, and principles, as well as blood pressure, were habitually high. When we replied to their letters we did not disillusion them.

I think we all nursed a secret hope that one day the dull routine of our existence would be enlivened by the arrival of somebody who was really glamorous—a film star, perhaps, with a voluptuous figure, an exquisite wardrobe, and a lurid past; or perhaps a refugee princeling with a fascinating accent and a glittering retinue of streamlined suitcases studded with labels of fashionable continental watering-places.

At all events, we watched with eager and undisguised curiosity

as the Drimbles' luggage arrived up the steps piece by piece.

It was at once clear that we were to be disappointed. Apart from a conventional lady's travelling-trunk with brass clasps that was obviously new, it was all undeniably shabby. There was a metal uniform-case with MAJOR E. W. DRIMBLE painted on it in white letters, two battered mule-trunks, miscellaneous suitcases, and a bag of assorted golf clubs, two of them with wooden shafts.

There was no scope for further speculation; unhappily, even tragically, but none the less obviously, the Drimbles were exactly like ourselves.

Most of us were halfway through our lunch when they arrived. Their ship was still in the harbour and the big dining-room with its marble pillars and long avenues of white tables was crowded with ship folk. Entrenched in our reserved enclosure in a quiet corner of the dance floor, we had closed our ranks and were making stiff and courtly conversation with each other while trying to ignore the noisy, ill-dressed throng of strangers that had settled on our flanks.

It is curious that Mrs. Drimble's entrance should under those conditions have made such a sensation. She stood for a long moment framed in the doorway and surveyed us all, with her hand resting on the handle of the green parasol that she had just folded. Yet it was not an entrance made by someone who wishes deliberately to create a sensation. There was an expression of wonderment on her face, a childlike naïveté, as if she could not believe that what she saw was real. Her face was haloed in a large, green-ribboned straw hat set back a little on her head so that a few tight curls of brilliant red hair showed on her forehead.

All eyes were upon her, and the hubbub of conversation had already begun to subside when an elderly man appeared behind her. Although he stooped slightly, he towered above her and could have looked over her head into the room if he had wanted to do so. But he was preoccupied in mopping his bald head and wiping his spectacles, and was clearly quite unaware that anything sensational was happening.

In fact, there seemed no reason to associate him with the slight and colourful creature standing in front of him. When he put away his handkerchief and placed a bony hand on her shoulder, I remember that it was something of a shock to realize that this ill-assorted couple was the Drimbles.

The drama of Mrs. Drimble's entrance evaporated at once. She turned and smiled affectionately up at him and allowed herself to be propelled gently but firmly into the room.

The head waiter took them in charge. Mrs. Drimble chattered

excitedly as they were led across the dance floor towards us, and she smiled happily at the leader of the orchestra as she passed. He bowed politely to her. Her elegant little steps rang crisply on the parquet floor, contrasting sharply with the long loping ungainly strides of her escort.

We saw her taking everything in as she went; the waiters in their white dhotis, with the traditional tortoise-shell combs in their hair, the big white ceiling fans ticking lazily round, the dishes on the polished sideboards piled high with tropical fruits, and it all seemed to fill her with a childlike delight.

Our hearts went out to Mrs. Drimble as she walked towards us. There was something about her unsophisticated enthusiasm for the surroundings in which we had spent such a large part of our lives that made us feel that they had been wasted years.

When they were still a few paces off she stopped, and a look of uncertainty crossed her face. She turned and spoke quietly to the head waiter for a moment, then threw a little self-conscious smile at us and led Major Drimble to a table in the middle of the room on the edge of the dance floor opposite the orchestra. Major Drimble followed, protesting mildly.

We were not deceived; the Drimbles did not want to sit with us. Yet we who, after all, regarded ourselves as the cream of respectable society were somehow not offended. Indeed, we understood what an unattractive lot we must have seemed to them and we were genuinely disappointed.

Mrs. Drimble settled herself in her chair, removed a pair of long white gloves, and looked excitedly round her. Impulsively she slipped her hand onto Major Drimble's knee, and though he looked away self-consciously and with feigned indifference, we saw his hand come down from the table to cover hers.

With an extravagant sweep, Mrs. Drimble removed her straw hat and patted her hair carefully. The light from the glass dome streamed down on her and for the first time we saw her face clearly . . . For a second, we were deceived. The red glow of her hair was dazzling. It was spectacular—too spectacular; then the scales fell from our eyes, and we realized that, despite her skilful attempts to conceal it, Mrs. Drimble was an elderly woman.

The Drimbles were with us for three months, and during that time they became an institution with us. Yet we never came to know them. In fact, talking about them afterwards, I could find no one who had exchanged more than a good-morning with them. We learnt, of course, that Major Drimble had been brought over from Europe to carry out some technical survey for the Department of Irrigation; that sort of information was public knowledge

in Colombo. But where they came from and what sort of people they really were remained something at which we could only guess.

Major Drimble's appointment could not have been a very exacting one. At half-past eight each morning he was seen walking briskly to the bathing-pool, where he flung off his bath-robe, removed his spectacles, and, shrouded in a vintage bathing-costume, plunged without a second's hesitation into the water. Using a meticulous breast stroke he swam two lengths, no more, no less. He then removed his dripping body from the water, wrapped it at once in his bath-robe, and, blowing heavily, padded back across the courtyard to his room. No trace of enjoyment ever crossed his face during this operation.

He left the hotel after a late breakfast, which they took in their room, and he returned for lunch soon after twelve. Usually they disappeared back to their room after lunch and often did not reappear until dinner-time. At week-ends they sometimes hired a car and went out of the city for the day.

Once, they went away for a night. We learnt a few days later that they had spent it in a rest-house on the edge of the game reserve where, according to the game warden, Mrs. Drimble's garden-party ensemble had so startled the wild animals that they had with one accord scattered into the jungle to lie low until she had left the district.

Apart from these outings and an occasional shopping expedition the Drimbles were in the hotel almost continuously. Yet except at lunch-time and at dinner we rarely saw them. It was as if they were determined to keep themselves to themselves.

I never saw a couple more ill-assorted. I cannot recall an occasion when Major Drimble showed emotion of any kind, and most of the time he seemed hardly aware of his wife's presence. By contrast, Mrs. Drimble's adoration of him radiated from her face. He absorbed her interest completely, so much so that it is doubtful if she really noticed that we were there.

I am sure that she had no notion how they fascinated us. She seemed as oblivious of being observed as a child who stands at a lighted nursery window looking out onto the stars and twinkling lights of the night, yet does not realize that a whole city is looking in.

The magic of the East never seemed to pall for her. She moved thus from week to week like someone in a dream, enchanted by all she saw and struggling to drag her consort into her dream world with her, as if that—and only that—would convince her that it was all real. Major Drimble remained, however, with both feet planted flatly and obstinately in the world of reality, unimpressed

and uncomfortably aware that her behaviour was exciting our intense curiosity.

As the days and weeks passed, we noticed that Mrs. Drimble had one anxiety: she was greatly worried that Major Drimble might cease to find her attractive. There was not the slightest doubt that her efforts to make the best of herself were for his benefit and not for the world at large. Nor could she possibly have been afraid of competition, for when Major Drimble looked at another woman at all it was with an expression of mild irritation, as if she was standing between him and something that he particularly wanted to look at. Nevertheless, Mrs. Drimble applied herself to the task of fascinating her husband with the endless patience and remorseless cunning of a Cleopatra.

She had banished decisively the idea of slipping naturally into a graceful and silver-haired old age. It must have needed some courage to take this decision, but once her hair had been plunged into the basin and she had shaken out those brazen locks for the first time, her boats had been burnt. There could be no compromise with such a tyrannical shade; her wardrobe, her manner, her whole way of life had to be of a youthfulness to match.

She threw herself whole-heartedly into her role and played to her one-man audience with the unself-conscious abandon of an actress who truly lives inside her part. She had been careful to provide herself with the right props, the large shady hats from beneath which dark eyes could be flashed seductively, the bright assortment of chiffon scarves to add lustre to her archness, and the close-fitting dresses daringly cut and flattering to the figure.

It was in the evening that she scintillated most brightly. They would come across the lawn from their room in the last glow of the tropical twilight and enter the great dining-room through the verandah. She would be hugging his arm with both hers and looking as radiant as a girl who has just been kissed in the rose garden, while he awkwardly towered above her, his face as expressionless as a turnip in a greengrocer's window.

Once they were settled at their table her performance really began. We never knew what it was they talked about; perhaps it was about us. But whatever it was, she talked vivaciously and incessantly, illustrating her words with pert little gestures and only stopping occasionally to look up into his face and laugh, as if trying to coax him into laughing with her.

She was never successful. Major Drimble either munched on or stared balefully out across the room till it seemed that she must at last be discouraged and herself relapse into silence. But the less Major Drimble reacted to her advances, the more did she redouble her efforts to entertain him.

Sometimes the orchestra played for dancing in the evening, and I remember the first time they got up to dance. It was early and the floor was empty. Mrs. Drimble rose first and stood on the edge of the floor with outstretched hands coaxing him to join her. I remember saying to myself, " This is too much; surely he will refuse and that will be the end of it all "—then bracing myself for the crisis that I felt sure would follow.

But he did not refuse. He wiped his mouth with his napkin and stepped unenthusiastically out onto the floor to join her.

After that, they danced often, and it was obvious that she loved dancing. Equally obviously, it meant less than nothing to Major Drimble. He plodded methodically round the floor, keeping strict time to the music and breaking the monotony of his progress only when his partner's sprightliness made it imperative for him to do so.

For Mrs. Drimble was in her element on the floor. She was no more content to match his gloomy progress than she was to match his conversation. She pirouetted round him, coaxing him to copy her steps, chattering and demonstrating, encouraging and endlessly laughing. Occasionally she would suddenly fall silent and give herself up to the joy of feeling her feet slide over the polished surface and, pressing her hips forward, would lean back and swing round him, with her skirt flared wide behind her and her eyes half closed. Major Drimble stood up to these outbursts of exuberance, as placid and as unemotional as a hop-pole.

When the music stopped, she would not leave his arms. It was as if she wanted to go on and on dancing. Yet when, as he always did after the second dance, he disengaged his hand, reached for his handkerchief to mop his brow, and nodded towards the table, she never allowed the least sign of disappointment to cross her face. I never saw them dance more than two dances in succession. They were a strange couple to watch on the floor, grotesque, comic, ridiculous even. But I remember the evening when a party of young planters were down from the Hills for a night out and how angry I felt when they laughed at them.

As we grew fond of the Drimbles so also did we grow anxious about them. It seemed impossible that Mrs. Drimble could continue to woo his affections at such pressure. No woman could do so in the face of such deliberate indifference.

Either he must succumb to her advances and show some warmth of affection for her, or she must give up from sheer exhaustion. If she gave up, it seemed that we might well have a tragedy on our hands. As time passed, we watched more and more anxiously for any sign that would give us hope.

We saw none until their last evening with us—the evening before they sailed for England. It was a Saturday night and the dining-room was crowded by the time they arrived and sat down at their table.

Mrs. Drimble was looking even more radiant than usual. Her hair had obviously just been touched up and it flamed at us like a bonfire. She was wearing a new dress that we had not seen before—kept back for the occasion perhaps—a turquoise-blue dress with the hem of the skirt encrusted with sequins. A white ermine wrap was thrown round her shoulders; this was the only time I ever saw a fur wrap worn in Colombo. It was clear to us all that she was about to make a supreme effort.

As soon as the band began to play, she rose and reached out her arms towards him. Major Drimble laid down his knife and fork, wiped his mouth, and rose too, with the usual disgruntled expression on his face. He took her awkwardly into his arms and together they launched out onto the empty floor.

Almost at once she slid into one of her ecstatic pirouettes, trailing her right hand as she swung round him and smiling provocatively up at him through half-closed eyes. As Major Drimble rotated to support her, I saw his eyes slide self-consciously over his glasses for a second to discover what impression they were making upon us. I cannot think that he was encouraged by what he saw.

Everyone was watching them, even the waiters; indeed, some of those present had heard that it was their last night with us and had come specially to see the final performance. From the undisguised amusement of the onlookers, it must have been obvious to Major Drimble that our attention was absorbed as completely as if they had been dancing flood-lit on a darkened stage.

Yet I do not believe there was one amongst us who had come to jeer at them or who felt anything but affection for them.

Then came tragedy. The music stopped as they were passing their table. The floor was still empty. Mrs. Drimble swept the fur wrap off her shoulders with a gesture such as Salome might have used before King Herod, and went back into Major Drimble's arms, waiting for the music to begin for their second dance. We saw for the first time that her dress was strapless—a young girl's dress.

As I waited for the music to start again, I realized something was wrong. The far side of the room, where the band was, had suddenly gone silent and the smiles had faded. The leader of the band was looking awkward and embarrassed and had lowered his baton again to his side. Mrs. Drimble turned towards him and eagerly motioned him to continue.

As she turned her back on our side of the room we saw what

the rest of the room had already seen, that her turquoise-blue dress was unzipped from shoulder to waist. There was no question of the zip having slipped a little: it was wide open—had never been zipped up at all—and the pathetic secrets of the corsetage and other apparatus required to contain her ageing figure were now shared by everyone in the room.

It seemed to take a long time for them to realize that something was wrong, though perhaps it was only fifteen or twenty seconds. But during those seconds there was a horrified silence in the room—horror not at the exposure of Mrs. Drimble's undergarments, but because, standing waiting for the music to begin in the centre of the dance floor, they alone were unaware that anything was amiss.

When it dawned upon them, Major Drimble was quick to react. Taking his wife by the shoulders, he turned her round and, with a touch of true comedy, placed his knee in the small of her back, and with one clean stroke zipped her up like a travelling-bag. A flutter of uncertain laughter spread round the room.

" Music! " called Major Drimble to the orchestra with a grand gesture, and as the music struck up, he clutched her purposefully to him and whirled her off in a succession of clumsy waltz steps towards their table. As they sat down, applause broke out and swelled, until there was not one of us who had not joined in.

Major Drimble pulled out his handkerchief, mopped his bald head, and as he began to wipe his spectacles, he looked across the table at his wife—and smiled.

There were perhaps twenty of us who went to see them off next morning. Several had sent flowers. The Drimbles were delighted with so much attention but we could see that they were puzzled by it. But we are old-fashioned in Colombo, and we like happy endings.

★ ★ ★

FAMILY ALLOWANCE!

On another occasion a gang of ruffians announced that they were about to burn the house, the wife and the children of a certain Monsieur d'Espremenil, but were deflected from their purpose by a wag who got up and said, " Messieurs, in my opinion we ought not to burn the house of Monsieur d'Espremenil, because it is not his, and only the poor landlord would suffer; nor his children, who are not his either; nor his wife, who is everybody's."

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART, *Dearest Bess*

HOME WITH THE HERRING

That storm lamp on the harbour wall was Neil's gesture of defiance

by HOWARD JONES

A FISHER lad in a pub at Shiel first told me of the returning herring. It had been a bad season for the boats, he said; fishing-grounds off the Ness had been well-nigh empty. But a few boats had ventured north to the greener waters against Machree and Dumcron Head, and they found the herring swarming.

His words stirred old memories. I seemed to see a hundred lugsails patterned on the ragged skies of Dumcron Loch. In the time of my youth there was herring a-plenty at Dumcron, and ling and lobster, too. But the herring moved far south to the Ness, God alone knows the reason, and the fishing boats came in no more.

I thought of those fine boats and of the tough, bearded men who sailed them. I thought of Neil Tighe, that cruel, unconquerable giant of a man. I thought of Nan O'Baine, my first true love, and how I had won her and lost her up there in Colernish Glen.

One evening, in the same pub, I met a man from the Fisheries who repeated this story of returning herring.

I listened to all he had to say, then I asked: "Does this mean the boats will come again to Dumcron?"

He shot me a puzzled look, as if the ancient prosperity of Dumcron was beyond his ken.

"If they follow the fish, they'll come," he said.

For long I had had the mind of returning to Dumcron. It was my true home, it had known the beginnings of my life, it should know the end.

And to myself I said, "Now indeed I will go back. After all these years I will go back and seek out Black Neil Tighe, and tell him of the returning herring."

It is not easy to reach Dumcron in these days. You may cross to Portlaig by an occasional steamer from the Firth. Thence a weekly coach will drag you to the southern limits of the island, and up the western coastal road; a wearisome, bone-rattling journey. You may hire a comfortable car if you are that rich;

or you may walk the twelve miles straight across moor and hills, as I did.

The old fish road is still there, but unless you be of long memory, you would not know it. It used to be a good road; you could reach Portlaig within the forenoon, carting your full load of lobster or cured herring. Now long disuse and frosts and sun have scoured the surface, and deep-rooted weeds have thinned it to a thread no wider than a sheep track.

But it was good to be there again, good to see the moor aflame with heather, to hear the cry of curlew high above. The moor has not changed, it is eternal. And the hills; these too are eternal, curving dark in the distance, like the loins of a sleeping bull.

I pictured Neil driving his horse along this road, a monstrous dark beast well matched to the master. Black Neil Tighe—there never was another like him, so cruel and strong, so formidable! When I was a boy he had already reached huge manhood. Black bearded and hairy he was, with a scar on his brow like a rowan leaf, and black hairs covering him, even to the fingertips.

They said he drew his strength from a poteen he brewed secretly by nights; but that, I dare to think, is a fishwives' tale. For my part, I never saw him drunk or in any wise uncertain in his purpose.

But I knew the strength of him, and his anger, and his roaring blasphemies. I have seen him, in a brawl, cast half a dozen strong men to the ground. I have seen them bloody and helpless on the harbour cobbles. There was no pity or charity, or any gentle thing in him.

His love was the sea, only the sea, and he gloried in its challenge. I have known him sail into seas no sane man would dare to face. I have seen him return with blood streaming from his fingers, and his hold crammed with the silver herring.

You feared him always, most times you hated him, but never did you hold him in contempt.

When the herring moved south, the boats and the herring-men moved too. I stayed, being orphaned and with none to trouble for, content to make my living from the humble lobster. Old John O'Baine, the blacksmith, and his long-limbed daughter stayed too, for they were rooted in Dumcron; O'Baines had dwelt there beyond the records and the memories of men.

And Black Neil stayed, swearing with fine arrogance that the herring would return. When some questioned his judgment, he cried, "You fools, it is so! I know it!"—as if he alone had fathomed this inner mystery of God.

But none heeded him. Gradually the boats departed, the harbour lay silent, creels and barrels rotted in the sun. Within three years Dumcron was forgotten, a place of memories and ghosts.

But at nights a storm lamp on the seaward wall of the harbour still burned brightly, and this was Neil's doing. He found the lamp and the oil for the lamp. Every evening at dusk he set a flame to the wicks. It was his gesture of defiance—as if to say: let fools of men depart, this anchorage will stand for ever!

I walked along the old road, losing it from time to time beneath the drape of heather, but picking it up unmistakably at the mouth of Colernish Glen. There in the glen, with the hills mounting steeply beside me, I sat down and lit my pipe.

All the ancient magic was here; in the air, the stillness and the sweetness of green things, the midges jigging in tiny clouds, the stream coursing easily to the sea. I remembered the names of the hills about me: Mort and Carivick, Rossdahail, Charnan and Hurrabhin. I remembered Nan O'Baine.

She was a lass of seventeen or eighteen in those days, long-limbed and firm-breasted, tough as all island women are tough. There was no great beauty in her saving the fineness of her skin. Her hair was middling brown and straight as straw; she had good wide eyes, the colour of slate.

There was that about her which held you at a distance though I know not how to name it. Her seeming indifference to a man, perhaps; or her silence and secrecy which you were unable to penetrate.

I do not recall when first I felt some fancy for her. But this I remember well: tramping homeward on a summer afternoon with creels on my back, and Nan, in her father's cart, overtaking me in the glen. She was come from Portlaig on some business for her father, so she said. I slung my creels into the cart and climbed beside her.

She was silent, she did not look at me. Presently I took the reins from her, turned the horse to the stream and halted there. I jumped down and tugged Nan after me.

Still she did not speak. She did not understand. I took her firm by the shoulders and I kissed her. She fought me madly, she fought like a wildcat. But at last she lay within my arms, breathless and full of love for me, calling me by fond and foolish names.

Long whiles we lay there under the sky. But presently she gave a sharp little cry and jerked herself away. I saw Neil striding down from the road; and as he drew close I saw his

cruel purpose and all my hopeless destiny in his dark eyes. He brushed down my hands with a single blow; and he struck my face, and struck and struck again.

What happened then I cannot truly say. I was aware of him not as a man but as an immensity of strength bent on my destruction. I was aware of blood, and of great pain, and of terror pounding in my heart. Then the anguish of my body seemed to leave me; I was alone, quite alone, suspended in some place of mists between earth and sky.

Time passed. I felt the chill earth beneath my shoulders, and through the slits that were my eyes I watched the flickering of a star.

So I lay in a timeless dream, watching the star, thinking nothing, feeling nothing. I closed my eyes, and when I tried to open them, I could not. But now I sensed the warmth of sunlight on my body, and I heard the rattle of a cart upon the road. The cart stopped, and in a little while I heard the voice of John O'Baine above me.

"God's mercy," said he; and gave me a drink and bathed my face in cool stream water. "God's mercy, that's a deal better." Then he asked, "Did you not know he has a mind to wed with Nan?"

I whispered, "How should I know? He must have her. In heaven's name, keep him from me."

"He is minded to wed her before the month is gone," said John O'Baine. "And who shall gainsay him? Not you, not I, my son. And I tell you this—he is your enemy. If you bide in Dumcron, some fearful harm will surely overtake you. I will carry you to Portlaig, if that pleases you, but never back to Dumcron. I will not have your life upon my conscience."

Honest, kindly John O'Baine! I'll speak strong for you at the dawn of Judgment Day! He carried me to Portlaig, a battered, broken youth, and he gave me some silver for my welfare, too. We must have passed over this very spot where now I sat, a grey and tired man, amongst the heather. I had never been back since.

I finished my pipe, and walked on through the glen. Presently I saw the loch afar off, a glimmer of silver cupped between dark slopes. Then at last the hills were behind me. I turned north on the coastal road, and so came to Dumcron.

Dumcron, my home! So silent it was against the sea, so empty, so hard to realize! I passed a row of what once had been cosy fisher cottages. Utter ruin lay upon them now. Roofs, doors, windows—all were gone. I saw tumbled walls, and weeds waist-high, and rafters like the ribs of men long dead.

I was filled with a great sadness. And I thought: what a fool am I to come home again! What a fool to seek Black Neil of all living men! Living? How could I be sure Neil was living? Why, then, he might be dead, yet somehow I could not picture it. I could not see that mighty man, with all his strength and lust for life, as anything but living.

I wandered to the harbour, I stood there by the crumbled wall, remembering the herring, and wondering if ever I should see those empty waters astir with boats again. Then I spotted a man beneath the wall, fashioning lobster-pots. I watched him for a while in silence, fascinated by his skill and quickness with the canes.

At length I called to him, "You, there! Where may I find Neil Tighe?"

His head jerked as if I had struck him. Then he stood and moved towards me, an old-young man with a beard and furrowed brown skin. "I'm Neil Tighe, sir," he said, touching his greasy cap.

He waited respectfully; and for these few moments I knew not what to say to him. Something about him—his silence, perhaps, or the hang of his lean body, or the passive look in his clear grey eyes—something brought to my mind the image of Nan O'Baine.

"I want him we used to call Black Neil," I said.

"Ah, him. That's me feyther."

"Would you take me to him?"

"Ay. He's a funny 'un, I warn ye. I'll take ye if so you'd be pleased to come."

We turned back along the road. His head was turned from me, but I felt him quizzing me from the corners of his eyes. He did not speak unless I questioned him.

I asked about Black Neil. "He's just funny, he doesna' understand things."

I asked about Nan. "She's well."

I asked if he ever netted the herring. "Nay, I'm a lobster-man." He was shy and ill at ease with me, clearly anxious to return to his pots.

He brought me to a cottage that once had been John O'Baine's. It was in good order still. There was a trim flower garden and beyond that a patch planted with potatoes.

"Get you in," he said, opening the door; then from over my shoulder he called, "Here's a man for to see old Neil."

I went in. An old woman was bending to a kettle over the fire. She straightened and looked at me, her mouth pushed to one side. A big, untidy, sagging woman she was.

Suddenly she gave a tiny flickering smile and spoke my name. I knew then that this was Nan. I tried to smile with her, and I took her hand, and spoke some easy greeting.

" 'Tis a long time," she said.

" Yes, a long time."

" Ay, many a year. Good to see ye."

" I've long meant to come," I said. I heard a man's step beyond the inner door and my heart stirred strangely at the sound.

He came in and gazed uncertainly, not at me but beyond me, his head tilted. I knew from the dark emptiness of his eyes that he was blind. And from the scar like a rowan leaf on his brow, I knew he was Black Neil.

But for all else I knew him not. As he stood there, white, and bowed, and shrivelled, leaning on his stick, he seemed like Time itself, old as the very hilltops, old beyond mercy and endurance.

I told him who I was. He dropped to a chair and asked in a throaty voice, " Man, what brings ye to Dumcron? "

I had meant to tell him of the returning herring, of all that I had learnt in the pub at Shiel. Yet how could I speak of it to this white husk of a man who never again would see the herring moon at Dumcron Head or the wind-ripped clouds above the loch?

I could not. I spoke instead of things that did not matter, whilst the woman busied herself with a brew of tea, glancing my way from time to time with that odd, vague smile moving on her lips.

Then Neil began to talk, husky and high-pitched, of Dumcron in olden time; how he had ventured this, that, and the other fine thing; and his blind eyes gleamed above the chipped rim of his cup. He talked and talked, and all the old arrogance was there. But now it sounded silly and pitiable, the hollow wishfulness of an ancient man for the vigours of his youth.

Presently Neil put down his cup and asked, " Does the light dim? "

" Ay, a little," I answered.

" Time to go down," he said, and took up his stick.

The woman turned to him with a little pleading cry. " Ah, not that foolishness tonight! Let it bide this one night! There'll come no harm! "

" Bring the lamp, wumman," he said.

He moved to the door and out to the road. His step was slow but firm; you had the feeling he was full sure of himself, sure of every stick and stone and pebble that he passed. The woman

scowled, and shook her head. Then she went to a cupboard, took out a great storm lamp, and followed him. I followed, too. And so we moved along the road, a strange little procession in the desolation of Dumcron. We reached the harbour.

He took the lamp, and secured it to a stanchion in the seaward wall. Then he drew a lighted match across the wicks, thrusting his fingers into the flame. Satisfied, he closed the lamp and turned back up the road.

Standing beside me, the woman whined softly. "That lamp, that lamp! It's God to him, it's more than God! Night after night, year in, year out! It's wicked madness, so I tell you!"

I looked at the beam flickering on those darkening waters, hearing her words, and yet not hearing, for Neil's old spell was at work in me. I realized anew, as she could not, the faith that had fired and sustained him through all these years—a faith immense, enduring, and invincible. Faith for the future of Dumcron.

We stood by the wall, the woman and I. Beneath us, in the uncertain light, young Neil still laboured at his pots.

"He is a good son," she said with a strange note of tenderness. "Work, work—he knows nothing but work. It would go hard for us without him."

"I judge him to be a good lobsterman," I answered.

She nodded. A pause, and then: "But should he not be? It's in his blood."

"I never knew Black Neil bother with the lobster," said I.

"That's what I mean," she said.

For a few seconds I did not understand. Then her meaning came slowly into me. I stared into her face, lost for any words.

She put her hand on my arm, and she said, "This has been my secret. He does not know of it, nor crazy Black Neil neither. But as God will one day judge me, it is the truth I am saying. It has been my secret always. But you shall share it, my man. You have the right."

In that moment the years seemed to fall from her. I saw her long-limbed and firm-breasted, as in days gone by. I took her hands and I kissed her, not in passion now, for that in both of us was spent, but for this good reminder of a love that once she gave me.

I was truly glad I had come home with the herring to Dumcron.

★ ★ ★

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, *why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?*

MAHOUSSIAN BEAST

The author of this witty and appealing fantasy is a contemporary French writer who won the Prix Interallié in 1951. Readers who enjoy meeting his engaging monster will be glad to know that one of his novels, "The Wind in the Sails," an unusual and imaginative seafaring story, has recently appeared in translation.

by JACQUES PERRET

IT was a little after sunset, and a small boy was walking along Vauban's Causeway, on the north side of the Mahoux Marsh. He was Léon Triquard, a young Parisian from Grenelle, spending his holidays at Beuf-le-Vidame with his Uncle Emile, a retired gendarme.

Usually he whistled, but this evening he contented himself with kicking a stone along in front of him, although he was rather late—very late, in fact, later than ever before; but when one has decided to tell one's uncle what Léon Triquard had just decided to tell his, an hour more or less makes little difference, and in view of the importance of his revelation the scolding would, in his opinion, misfire.

The night was clear, and the sky seemed more immense than ever over the wet, flat lands which the boy was crossing westwards. To his left, night was already falling over the marshes which stretched to the horizon, the elms had put on grotesque disguises, and here and there the land exhaled a greenish mist over the closing water-lilies.

It must really be very late; over there towards the Seine the motor barges had been silent for some time. The only distinct and considerable sound was that of little Léon's feet ringing on Vauban's Causeway and kicking at his pebble. Before him the sunset still gilded the ragged edges of a long cloud stretched across the western sky, and, towards the Pitouille Ditch, where the work was going on, the bulldozers and the great stump-extractors, now idle and silent, stood out against the mauve sky.

They were draining the Mahoux Marsh. It was not the first time they had tried. The monks had tried, of course, as early as the ninth century, as the two sluice-pillars half immersed in the mud still bore witness. Then Francis I, coming from Le Havre, conceived the idea of detailing a regiment of undisciplined freebooters to purge their disgrace there and redeem themselves by honest labour; but to convert freebooters to earth-shifting is a thankless

"I cannot give an opinion upon things that do not exist," announced the Mayor

enterprise, and cleverer men than Francis I have failed at it. Finally, of course, Vauban took the matter in hand between two sieges, just long enough to throw up a dike, which was as far as he got.

And so it was always the marsh that had the last word. As soon as the teams were in place and the work begun, there came mysterious movements in the mud, choking up half a league of drainage in a night. Not until these days of heavy machinery, of government grants for rural equipment, and the universal condemnation of unproductive land, had it been possible to undertake the draining of the Mahoux Marsh successfully.

To tell the truth, it would have been done long before, had not all attempts met with the ill will of the inhabitants, who not only preferred the windfalls of fenland life to the benefit of punctual crops, but still feared the vengeance of the Mahoussian Beast, that eponymous monster lurking in its immemorial slime.

Léon Triquard abandoned his pebble at the Drue-Bourette cross-roads and turned left along the Freebooters' Road, which bordered a large tract of land recently reclaimed from the marsh. At the end of it lay the village, with all its lights on for the evening, the grocer's shop already closed, the bicycles with their lamps on, and, just over there, Uncle Emile working himself up to be cross. When he went into the kitchen, Uncle Emile was still at table, with Touine his housekeeper.

"Uncle Emile, I want to explain—"

"To explain is to lie," said Uncle Emile, in a very severe voice, somewhat muffled by macaroni cheese. Continuing to chew, he looked at his nephew and shook his head with studied deliberation, as if to say: "What have *I* done that heaven should . . ."

Emile Triquard had embraced the profession of gendarme, on a solid n.c.o. foundation, in the days when there was no need to be a third-class graduate in order to make a good gendarme. And a good gendarme he certainly had been, notwithstanding his rather too indulgent and understanding nature.

"No, it's no use your sitting down, my boy—off to bed with you. I shall write your father tomorrow that you are a little night bird, entirely devoid of any family pride or moral sense. Where are you off to? Sit down! Besides," continued his uncle, turning round to stretch his arm to the sideboard, "besides, before you have any supper you are going to do your homework, and no arguing, because I will not let you shirk it. You may be a vagabond but you are going to be an educated vagabond."

And his uncle slapped on the table an exercise book, and a Latin primer opened at page 45 in accordance with the day's programme, which consisted of an exercise on the future perfect. *The nymphs will have loved the shadow of the woods.*

Léon took absolutely no interest in the nymphs, which for him were as yet nothing but sources of mistranslation, but his uncle had promised his parents to supervise the daily accomplishment of the prescribed holiday task, and he did so with all the intransigence of an ex-gendarme who has suffered a great deal by reason of his own lack of education.

" But listen," said Léon again, " I want to explain . . ."

But his uncle re-embarked upon his admonitions. He seemed all set for a comprehensive discourse on juvenile delinquency.

As he was speaking, Touine seized the opportunity to slip a plate of soup in front of Léon, then returned to her place, fixing on the boy her small, round pink eyes bordered with pale lashes. Deaf, incoherent of speech, humpbacked, Touine was a local old maid and kept house for Uncle Emile with morbid devotion. When she was seated, her chin was on a level with the tablecloth, and she looked like an intelligent old albino bitch. As soon as the door had opened, she had smelt something strange enter with the boy, and from that moment had not taken her eyes off him.

A butterfly, which was fluttering about the ceiling, came down and alighted on a bottle; sustained by the vibration of its downy wings, the insect clumsily circled the neck, then stopped, quivering, its head pointed towards Léon, its antennae twitching, as though transmitting signals of the greatest urgency.

The clock under its glass cover began to strike, when the boy declared in a limpid voice: " It was the Mahoussian Beast that made me late."

" Ten o'clock! " said his uncle. " A fine time to come home! What was that you said about a beast? "

" The Mahoussian Beast. It was she who made me late."

On the level of her plate, old Touine uttered a little birdlike cry, followed by a spate of meaningless words, but Uncle Emile made a rapid and violent gesture forbidding her to intervene.

" You have been detained by the Mahoussian Beast? " he asked in an icy voice.

Léon had not yet mentioned his dealings with the Beast to anyone, and no doubt would not have mentioned her to his uncle if he had not been morally forced to do so by the course of events. A dragon in one's life cannot be concealed indefinitely.

Slowly Uncle Emile leaned across the table. " The Mahoussian Beast? " he repeated. " Continue, you interest me."

That, of course, was only a manner of speaking, but Léon did as he was told and continued in a firm voice: " Well, then, this was it: if the draining goes on and the whole marsh is dried up either she'll die or else she'll have to go away. She is used to living in the marsh, and, as she says, she can't see herself living comfortably among barley and, still worse, among beetroots."

" Oh yes? Your beast claims the right to oppose the progress of agriculture? "

" I don't know, but it would break her heart to leave this district. Anyway, I've got to warn you," said Léon, who felt an impatient

sob rising in his throat, " that although she's not ill-natured, she has decided to mess up the ceremony that the Prefect is coming to, if she's not left in peace."

" Now, be quiet and get on with your work, you cheeky little Parisian. You graciously permit yourself to introduce dragons into the affairs of the township, and revive extinct monsters to help you out of your little troubles! That is very promising. And it is Touine," he continued suddenly, " who has stuffed all this rubbish into your head—eh, Touine? " he howled into her ear. " You have stuffed his head full of Mahoussian Beasts, and now he thinks I am a fool and comes and serves her up to me."

It must be explained that in her young days Touine had also claimed to have seen the Beast, and shortly afterwards sundry infirmities had come upon her. Rather mythological and inexplicable things had been insinuated about the alleged interview.

Uncle Emile's wrath had little effect upon the deaf old woman, who suddenly replied with a torrent of meaningless gibberish which Léon maliciously pretended to find quite clear. Then his uncle, really irritated, banged his fist upon the table, and the little boy burst into sobs.

The ex-gendarme, who had always had a tendency to release weeping prisoners, calmed down at once.

He put down his napkin, rose slowly, for his joints were painful, and went to console his nephew with affectionate words, pushing forbearance so far as to say that, after all, a real monster had no need to call an inexperienced boy to its aid, and that the Mahoussian Beast in particular had the reputation of being very well able to look after herself.

" But she's too old now! " cried Léon, weeping harder than ever.

Uncle Emile went back to his chair, his face once more scowling. " Eat your supper," he said, " you can do your work afterwards."

Then, pushing back his chair and rolling a cigarette, he pretended to lose all interest in the affair, but was soon irritated by the to-and-fro of the soup-spoon tranquilly carrying out its functions as though nothing had happened.

" For someone who has seen the Mahoussian Beast," he said, " you have a good appetite."

Not seeing any connexion, Léon did not reply. Then his uncle appeared to remember, as though by chance, an insignificant detail: " And so, if I understood you properly," he said, " your Beast can talk? "

" Oh yes, she talks just like anyone else. With an accent, of course, but it doesn't bother you."

" I am glad to hear that," said his uncle, strumming upon the tablecloth.

Then, in a very calm voice, with great self-control and the air of a man who only asks for information: " Is it a Beuf-le-Vidame accent or a Marseilles accent? "

" It's more complicated than that."

" You are right. It is very complicated, very," said his uncle

with truly astonishing calm. " And can you explain to me how it is that poachers who know the marsh much better than you—? "

" The Beast won't let a lot of yokels see her."

The word " yokels " had a bad effect, and Uncle Emile burst out anew. But Léon began to sob, and asked, " Why won't you believe that I have seen the Beast? " Then, raising his head and licking away a tear, he repeated in a firm voice: " Why not, tell me that? "

Since no really satisfactory reply suggested itself, Uncle Emile shrugged his shoulders and poured out half a glass of cider. Silence. Tick-tock. Why not? Certainly, he thought it rather odd that the Mahoussian Beast, so long absent from human gaze, should reappear now merely to provide an alibi for his nephew, but then, in the course of his professional duties, he had had occasion to verify certain very far-fetched alibis.

" Come, now," he said gently. " The Mahoussian Beast—I can't let a falsehood of that calibre pass without requiring some explanation."

" That's all I want to do—explain," said Léon.

" Then explain! " Hurriedly, Léon related how he made the acquaintance of the Beast one day when he had gone to set nets for pike and, without knowing it, had moored his punt to the end of her tail, which looked like a forked tree.

At first she made a terrific row, but on learning that Léon came from Paris, soon calmed down, because the founder of the Mahoussian race was the great Lemurine Pterodactyl of the Paris Chalk.

Next, on being invited to describe the Beast, Léon presented her as a dromedary in the shape of a lizard, with a crowd of incoherent, monstrous details that made it quite clear that she was absolutely distinct from oriental monsters such as sphinxes, minotaurs, and other heathen creatures. Notwithstanding her muddy habitat, she was, by nature and mission, a truly Gallic monster.

She was getting weaker every day, not so much from age as from shortage of good wet living-space and lack of appetite, for she contented herself by chewing over her memories, with here and there a mouthful of tadpoles, or a bushel of small fry, or three square metres of duckweed.

She was beginning to get worried about what would become of her; the noise of the pumping-engines and bulldozers was getting on her nerves; and she was passing some very unhappy days feeling the stagnant water ebb gently away between her claws.

For more than an hour, without stopping, little Léon repeated a mass of bizarre but instructive things, and Uncle Emile listened, gave his opinion, stared, and drank it all in. When midnight came he signed to the boy to stop talking. " All right," he said, passing his hand over his moustache, " that's midnight striking. Pick up your books, you can do your work tomorrow."

" All the same, I think it is rather odd for an ex-corporal of gendarmes to come here and tell me old wives' tales from the

middle ages." Monsieur Vétu, Mayor of Beuf-le-Vidame, shuddered imperceptibly, like a usurper who suddenly hears it said to his face that the lawful prince has been seen prowling round the outskirts of the capital.

The two men did not like each other, and Uncle Emile, guessing that the Mayor's haughty incredulity concealed an anxious mind, boldly rammed home the reality of the monster and brought his report to an end.

"There," he said, "that's all I know, but I thought it needed thinking about."

"I cannot give an opinion upon things that do not exist," said Monsieur Vétu.

"Are you suggesting that my nephew is lying?"

"Why, no, it is just a hoax, which any boy of his age might think up."

"A hoax, Mr. Mayor, a hoax? Very well, but when you were told that the Germans were at Andelys you said that was a hoax, and after all, there they were all the time. Besides," added Uncle Emile, tapping the floor with his stick, "why shouldn't little Léon have seen the Mahoussian Beast? Why not?"

"Why not? It is extremely simple and logically incontrovertible; because your monster does not exist."

"Very well, Mr. Mayor, let us assume that that is so. But I do not see why the fact of its not existing should prevent my nephew seeing this Beast."

For a moment, Monsieur Vétu seemed shaken by this observation, but he was not the man to let himself be outmanœuvred by a retired gendarme.

He granted that the Beast might have been seen by little Léon, but to deduce from that that the Beast existed—that, he said, every man of sense would hesitate to do.

"I only thought that something ought to be done, because of next Sunday's ceremony. I have no need to tell you that the Beast is very much against it."

"The Inauguration of the Reclaimed Land," declared the Mayor, in his best tremolo, "will bring to an end all these lamentable goings-on, and we shall plant potatoes in these unsavoury depths. And now, let us hear no more of your precious Beast."

Uncle Emile put on his cap, but you could tell that the best was still to come.

"I shall say no more, Mr. Mayor, except one thing: this morning I saw with my own eyes not only an animal's footprint as big as *that*, but also an absolutely sensational dropping—with all respect, Mr. Mayor, unique in this world. And I might add that it looked quite fresh to me, and it was situated precisely where it would obstruct the great Mouflettes drainage channel—manifest indication of the Beast's opinion of the reclamation works."

So matter-of-fact a man as Monsieur Vétu could not take lightly evidence of such a concrete nature, coming as it did from a former sworn official. But two seconds were enough for him to shrug his

shoulders and declare that such a demonstration seemed to him rather coarse.

" Well," concluded Uncle Emile, " in my opinion, the obstruction constitutes sabotage of a kind that, it seems to me, you cannot ignore. Besides," he added over his shoulder as he made his way to the door, " I ought to warn you that, according to my nephew, the Mahoussian Beast is planning a little surprise for Sunday's ceremony."

The first thing Uncle Emile did on returning home was to ask if the boy had come back. " The big cupboard is full of golden spiders," Touine replied calmly, stirring the coffee.

" Good! " said Uncle Emile, shrugging his shoulders.

Returning to the dining-room, where he opened the door to let the cat out, he heard a noise up in the attic. It could only be the boy. He took his cane and went up as quietly as possible.

" What are you doing? "

Léon was near the skylight, on his knees before an ancient top hat, and holding in his hands a round, whitish object the size of a melon. He seemed extremely upset at having been taken by surprise. His uncle approached, his hand stretched out towards the object, but Léon crouched over it, fanatically protective.

" It is the Mahoussian Beast's egg," he said in a surly tone.

Uncle Emile recoiled a step and gravely nodded his head, both hands resting on his cane.

" Well! " he said. " So your dragon is laying now, is she? "

" It's her very last egg," explained Léon, reassured by his uncle's attitude. " She gave it to me. See how lovely it is."

Léon held it under the skylight and his uncle bent over to look. The egg was perfectly spherical and looked like an opaque electric bulb, with the vaguely iridescent sheen of a fine pearl.

" It is rather small," remarked Uncle Emile, " and not at all in proportion to what we saw this morning."

" It is small, but it is heavy."

" Let me see."

" Be careful, it's her last one."

His uncle wiped his hands on his trousers and took the object with paternal care. " Very remarkable," he said. Then he added anxiously: " It seems very cold—is that all right? "

" Oh yes. She is not a warm-blooded animal."

" Are you going to keep it in that old hat? "

" Yes, it makes a good place. She has told me what to do, with a handful of reeds in the bottom and on top, loosely filled in with clover and barbel spawn. I've got all I need in this haversack. It has to be watered now and then with stagnant water."

" It won't go addled? "

" No, it'll keep for a thousand years," said Léon, placing the egg in the bottom of the hat, already lined with rotting reeds.

" That was your grandfather's wedding hat," remarked Uncle Emile casually.

" That's all right, "replied the boy, preparing a handful of slimy grass to wedge the egg firmly. Then he enjoined his uncle not on any account to say a word to anyone: " No one, no one at all, do you swear? "

" Of course," said his uncle, appreciating the weight of the secret. Nevertheless, he felt a certain uneasiness at finding himself the accomplice of an egg that was liable to disturb public order.

That evening Monsieur Vétu came to see Uncle Emile, and told him that to satisfy his conscience he had been to have a look at the allegedly fabulous dropping at the entrance of the Mouflettes drainage channel.

" Well? " said Uncle Emile, his face lighting up. " And what did you think of it? "

" However big it is," said Monsieur Vétu, " I shall not let myself be intimidated."

" Quite right."

" Without pronouncing upon the authenticity of the phenomenon," said Monsieur Vétu, " I agree that there is food for thought. Tomorrow morning I shall warn the deputy engineer. Up to an hour ago no one to my knowledge, except ourselves, knew anything about this idiotic affair, but I am afraid that it will be talked of at any moment. Whilst the Prefect is preparing his discourse on ' Modern Technology and the Progress of Rural Prosperity,' " continued Monsieur Vétu, using his tremolo again, " superstition and all that follows in its train is making a triumphal entry."

" Pardon me, Mr. Mayor, but if the Beast exists, it is not a superstition."

" Would you like to come and see her? " proposed Léon, in an off-hand voice.

Monsieur Vétu turned round sharply, his face severe, as though the boy had uttered some gross impertinence.

" In my opinion," said the boy's uncle in a conciliatory tone, " an interview between the Mahoussian Beast and the Mayor of Beuf-le-Vidame seems desirable in the interests of all concerned."

" Dare you! " said the boy, standing up.

Monsieur Vétu seemed suddenly to be listening to some noise outside.

Léon went and took down his haversack from its hook.

" Anyway, *I'm* going, I've got an appointment," said the boy, kissing his uncle, then adding in a low voice, " look after the egg. I may be away a long time, but don't worry."

The Mayor stood up and rammed his cap resolutely upon his head. Then he said, " Very well, I'll go."

Uncle Emile limped with them to the door, and the three of them stopped on the threshold to listen to certain sounds in the village: anxious voices were sounding in the darkness; there came the rhythm of clogs in panic, the slamming of shutters, and the grating of heavy doors not often closed.

" There, they know! " said Uncle Emile.

The boy threw his haversack over his shoulder and took the lead, hands in pockets.

" Don't do anything rash, now," said the old gendarme, whilst Touine left her kitchen and trotted to the door. Leaning over the threshold, she turned her head to right and left, then stopped, her neck craned towards the Frocard road where the two shadowy figures had just disappeared.

" Oh yes, oh yes," she said in her little birdlike voice, " moon-peelings in the bristles of my broom, oh! A brick in the fire—and pop! It's a bun . . ."

Thinking that there had already been quite enough complications for one evening, Uncle Emile closed the door and gently waved Touine off to bed.

In the village, all doors were barricaded; not a cat walked the streets; the radios were silent. Léon and the Mayor set off silently along the Freebooters' Road. The night was clear, with a fine half-moon, and visibility perhaps insufficient for scientific observation but good enough to prevent one from taking a willow for an ogre or an elm for Oberon. All the same, as they passed across the western end of the drainage works, where the tortured outline of a mechanical shovel rose up between two squat bull-dozers, the Mayor felt almost uneasy.

Léon, still going at a good pace, slipped through an osier-bed to the old Morfaloup pond, paddling for some way through ankle-deep mud. Then he made his way along a winding track among brambles, past a clump of poplars waving wild branches, and reached a swamp choked with foxtails, where he asked his companion to wait for a few minutes. It was the first time they had spoken since leaving the village.

The boy disappeared over to the right, with a confused splashing noise and a swishing of reeds, while the Mayor waited, his feet entangled in a mat of figwort and spurred knot-grass. Then Léon returned, propelling an old half-rotten punt, helped his passenger in, and steered laboriously through a patch of yellow iris, sliding across the viscous water where innumerable frogs were now shouting themselves hoarse.

After about a quarter of an hour they entered a narrow channel, and soon they grounded. Léon jumped out, hauled the boat a little way up on the mud, and asked the Mayor to follow him very carefully.

The Mayor walked at the boy's heels. He was beginning to yield to the influence of this marsh, which in the moonlight became more and more like the home of a monster.

At last Léon came to a halt, and began to whistle. The two of them were standing with their feet in rather warm mud at the edge of a water-hole, the surface of which, motionless as a well-set jelly, showed the exact reflection of the moon without a wrinkle. In the middle of the water-hole there emerged a sort of oblong islet, tipped with stiff grasses and fringed with little water-lilies.

" Well? " muttered Monsieur Vétu with simulated impatience. " Are we going to see this animal? "

" She is not an animal," said Léon, " she is a Beast. And there she is."

In the middle of the islet, along its greater axis, there suddenly rose, like a great fan, a membraneous crest. At the same moment, while the viscous water slowly wrinkled, contorting the reflection of the moon, there emerged, some ten feet in front of the islet, the streaming, silent, and very wary head of the Mahoussian Beast.

At first sight, seen in profile, it resembled a vast horse's head, much elaborated in the heraldic style, with a protruding upper lip, like that of a camel. Round the orifice of the clear-cut nostrils there trembled a phosphorescent vapour. Two lids slowly separated to reveal the tired glitter of a great faceted eye.

" It is the Mayor, Monsieur Vétu, who wanted to see you," said Léon.

The Beast did not reply at once, but thrust her neck a little farther out of the water. It thickened into a chest covered with articulated plates, while the sharp crest which mounted up to her nape waved and rippled with a noise like thick brown paper. Then she turned her head to see what this was all about.

Opening her mouth, which was much more deeply slit than one would have imagined, the Beast took a somewhat broken-winded breath, mixed with hiccups and cavernous gaspings, for she had remained under water all afternoon, and, like most very old amphibians, she had begun to find difficulty in passing from one element to the other.

The noises of the marsh began to withdraw gradually beyond the bounds of a great circle of silence, and the concert of frogs rapidly died away like the chatter in the pit when the curtain rises. It was then that the Mahoussian Beast emitted a croak, deeply vibrating like the lowest notes of a tuba.

" *Wha-a-a-t a-ab-o-ou-u-t?* " said she.

The sound-wave was so strong that the Mayor felt it pass across his face. During the long walk he had prepared various conversational openings, but he now decided to utilize the little breath that remained at his command to strike to the very core of the problem.

" Do I understand," he cried, " that it is your intention to create some disturbance during the Inauguration? "

" All such ceremonies are essentially senseless and yours, I suspect, will be disastrous," replied the Beast, who, in order to master so many sibilant consonants, had protruded her tongue, a slim, forked stalk which vibrated in her breath. She emitted a few more inarticulate stridulations, as if testing her voice, then spoke again, whistling out her s's with trenchant authority.

" Seest thou not, stupid desecrator of these spongy spaces, seest thou not what sinister harvest shall spring from the dehydration of moisture-seeking monsters, O insatiable sower of mercenary cereals, base subsidizer of servile lucerne, siccative swashbuckler, obscene spoiler, etceterass-s-s . . "

The end of this discourse was merely an unintelligible whistle, and the breathless Beast, to finish up, spluttered out a row of dots which shot into the darkness like tracer bullets.

" Well," said Léon, " she knows how to take care of herself, doesn't she? "

" We must not lose our nerve," muttered Monsieur Vétu. Then, in a toneless voice, he tried to propose a compromise, but the dragon cut him short by requiring as a prerequisite the delivery of a tribute of twelve virgins.

" But that's draconian! " said the Mayor.

" I was born draconian and shall die draconian," declared the monster, proudly bridling her neck, " and if the kingdoms of the earth fall into decay and the treasures of the world into dust, it will have been caused by too many dragons not being draconian."

" Hear that? The future perfect! " said the admiring boy.

" That's all very well," observed Monsieur Vétu, " but twelve virgins won't be so easy to find in this township."

" It's for you to find them," said the Beast. " Afterwards, in spite of my great age, I might agree to single combat, provided you put forward as my opponent a young, well-armoured baron, a budding knight who wants to make a reputation—and make it very cheaply, I may add—by knocking out a poor old tired dragon."

" But we've neither barons nor virgins in Beuf-le-Vidame," cried the Mayor in the tone of a man who has heard too much. " I suppose you believe in Santa Claus, too, don't you? "

" And as for you," growled the monster, thrashing the water with a tremendous flourish of her tail, " I suppose you don't believe in the Mahoussian Beast, do you? "

Splashed with gluey mud, his face plastered with frog-spawn, the Mayor, still obdurate, tried to reply that as a matter of fact he did not. But the words stuck in his throat, and the Beast put an end to the conversation by vomiting up a great mass of fire, which dropped blazing at Monsieur Vétu's feet.

He left precipitously, and even Léon found the atmosphere a trifle laden. Eventually the Beast sniffed back her flames and subsided limply into the swamp. " Why did you have to bring me that jackanapes? " she asked in a plaintive voice. " I am too old for these games, my little Léon."

" All the same, you managed it then."

" Yes, but I had to force it. Pyrotechnics tire me more than anything; it takes me a long time to get over them."

" Don't forget the Inauguration on Sunday."

" I shall not be in a fit state for it. It's a pity, but I shall have to drop the idea. But the important thing was to discharge my last fire, and now that is done. So many monsters have crept away without discharging their last fire "

" Are you going now, then? "

" Yes; let me breathe for five minutes, and then we'll be off."

For a long time it had been evident to the Beast that her existence was precarious, even doomed, on an earth that had completely

refashioned its conception of monsters, and now produced horrors of a more modern character. She intended, therefore, to make her way discreetly to the depths of the sea, via the bed of the Seine.

"My egg?" she asked.

"Don't worry, Uncle is looking after that."

There was a pause, during which the Beast, who was floating on the surface of the water, came gently but heavily close to the boy, like a wrecked ship about to founder.

"You had better let me go by myself," she said in a touching though monstrous murmur. "The journey will be difficult, and if I die on the way, it will give you a lot of trouble."

"And how will you get through the locks on your own?" asked the boy.

"I shall go round them, on the bank."

"Excuse me, but you don't know what it is like."

"That is true. I sometimes wonder if I am capable even of reaching the river."

"Just wait while I fetch my punt and I'm with you."

He found the punt and, waiting for him in it, the Mayor, looking a little crumpled, smiling at nothing in particular, and humming an old polka tune. Although he had no time to waste, he took the Mayor over to solid ground which it was possible to walk on, and Monsieur Vétu, still humming his polka, docilely got out of the boat and set off for home.

Léon towed his craft along the channels to the Beast's lair. He stopped a little way from her, anticipating an eddy. The monster was gathering her strength; first her crest fell back onto her spine with a loud rattle, then her tail submerged to get a grip on the bottom, her neck swayed heavily, and suddenly, with a supreme effort, the Mahoussian Beast unstuck herself from the mud.

"Bravo!" said Léon, then he thrust on his pole, tacked about, and began to retreat. The dragon followed him. August and broken-winded as an ancient, dropsical king she lumbered along, but her muddy neck was borne with lofty grace, and her head wagged haughtily.

As long as she had the good swampy water to take the weight of her belly the Beast travelled fairly well through her native mire, but it was not possible to avoid crossing Vauban's Causeway, and this was extremely heavy going. Though she still found the air a more or less breathable element, she had lost the habit of moving in it with ease, and the hard earth was not well suited to her great feet after their long steeping in slime.

Little Léon encouraged her, using a bargee's vocabulary for the purpose, and at last the grateful monster, with a great twitch of her hind quarters, reached the dry, hard road, and stayed there panting for a few moments.

At last they reached a steep slope leading down to the Seine. The moon was shining again. Balancing herself at the top, the Beast dropped back on her haunches so as to slide into the water as

quietly as possible. A wave ran to the other bank, then unrolled itself along the verge, making every barge moored between there and Bonnières dance up and down. Then it burst gaily into Argenteuil and swept on to the Pont Neuf, where two despairing lovers, seeing it pass, decided to postpone their fatal leap.

The dragon was slow in reappearing. Here and there, a few eddies seemed to betray her gambolling, and several rather elderly pike leapt to an unusual height. Léon was beginning to feel anxious, when she at last emerged before him, very much more cheerful and shaking her head and snorting as boisterously as a young seal.

"The water is *marvellous*!" she whispered hypocritically, like a bather on a cold day.

Then, turning her back, she placed the tip of her tail on the bank like a gangway, and the boy, sitting astride the slimy scales, advanced by little jumps to the broader lumbar region where he could walk erect, holding on to her crest, which she reared up for his benefit. On reaching the level of her shoulder, he arranged a fold of membrane so that he could install himself in it as in a deck-chair.

"Ready?" whispered the Beast from the corner of her mouth.

"Ready!" murmured Léon.

With a vigorous flip of her tail, the Beast shot into the middle of the river and steered gracefully downstream.

At about two in the morning, the lock-keeper at Amfreville, who was sleeping in his little cabin, heard a knock on the window. He put on the light, got up, and opened the door.

"It's to let the Mahoussian Beast through the lock," said the boy standing before him, hands in pockets.

"Mahoussian Beast? The lock?'" replied the man. "Just turn round, you young villain, and see if I don't give you a kick on the backside!"

"I've no time to waste," said Léon. "I am piloting the Mahoussian Beast to Le Havre and you must let us through the lock."

The dialogue became very animated. At last, just as the lock-keeper was threatening to call the police, there came a loud splashing, followed by gruntings and gurglings as if a cow had fallen in and was mooing in the mud.

The man, who was going back to his cabin to telephone, stopped suddenly, turned round slowly, and said, in a more conciliatory voice: "What was that? Did you say the Mahoussian Beast?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, we shall have to see. Perhaps we could just . . ." mumbled the man, advancing cautiously along the quay behind Léon.

It was at that moment that he saw, rising up over the edge, a heavy, horny head, leaning nonchalantly on the granite. Two great round, flat eyes, like cut-glass saucers, shot a confused glance at him. From that moment the lock-keeper decided that he was

dreaming, and everything became easy. He threw his cap on the ground, ran to the controls, and during the whole operation, chatted away as he was accustomed to do with bargees by day, raising his voice a little as the level of the water dropped.

At twenty kilometres a night, the voyage continued fairly smoothly with no great trouble or serious obstruction. But the Beast found it very tiring to swim on the surface, and so they arranged that an hour before dawn Léon would disembark to find a quiet corner for a sleep, while the dragon went with delight to submerge in the deepest and softest part of the river-bed.

From these depths she would return at twilight, greatly refreshed and with a heap of lively reminiscences in which the boy took much delight. For this reason they adopted the practice, especially during the later stages of the journey, of passing a few hours of the day together, concealing themselves as best they could among the scanty reeds along the bank and chatting quietly.

One day, having finished an account of her troubles with a band of quarrelsome unicorns in the pay of the Duke of Bedford, the dragon was beginning to tell the story of her encounter with Touine, when they heard a couple of bathers dive into the river. Swimming along by the bank, the girl wished to support herself on a tree-stump, and placed her hand on the muzzle of the Beast, who by way of welcome blew out a great shuddering sigh in the manner of horses.

Greatly pleased, the girl stroked the Beast's nostrils very affectionately, like an experienced naiad, just at the moment when the man, who was perfecting his style in deeper water asked her what was happening. She swam to him with a leisurely backstroke, calling out in a water-fowl's voice that she had just seen a perfect little duck of a dragon in the reeds.

Among adventures of another kind, crossing the port of Rouen was rather a delicate matter on account of its congestion, but this was accomplished without mishap before dawn, thanks to the great plumes of thick smoke that the Beast poured out, like a tug whose stoker is in a hurry to finish up some bad coal.

Generally speaking, the occasional person chance brought into contact with the travellers caused no grave incident. One Sunday morning, the tired Beast let herself collapse quite near the bank, in such a way that her back, on which some marshy debris was still vegetating, offered a vague resemblance to those great mounds of earth that lightning-struck willows carry away with them into the water.

Just as she was crouching down, there came a fisherman who, attracted by the site, ventured on to the monster's spine, settled himself there, opened his camp-stool, baited his hook, and threw out his line. Towards ten o'clock the harassed Beast began to sway on her feet and to sink down very slowly, hoping that the man would not notice the descent. But at half past ten, succumbing to sleep, she suddenly collapsed, and the man, already in water

up to the calves, drew in his line, snatched up his belongings which were afloat on the current, rolled up his trousers to his knees, and set off along the submerged tail to the bank.

One is naturally tempted to attribute a great influence to the rich nature of such a philosophical and—in some respects—metaphysical old monster. Incited by the boy's questions, she did indeed sometimes evoke, not without a certain complacency, a variety of her powers, notably with regard to metamorphosis, and boasted of having succeeded in her youth in bringing off sudden mutations, for instance, from lion to grasshopper.

Finally, the Beast decided to give a last demonstration. Led by Léon, she hoisted herself on shaky legs and tottered to the market-place of Saint Burnehoulde, a riverside village which was celebrating the festival of its patron saint with fireworks and torches.

Their entry was keenly applauded as a surprise attraction, and the local brass band marched round them playing *Sambre et Meuse*. The opportunity was seized to let off a firework display, which was not at all bad, but the Beast winked at Léon, stretched out her neck, and shot from the corner of her mouth a string of classical blue, green, and yellow fusees which exploded high in the sky, illuminating an immense canopy garlanded with multicoloured lights. Then, protruding her soft lips, she breathed out very accurately a whole swarm of incandescent circles of all colours, flying saucers, rings of Saturn—wandering haloes and clouds of glory, which slowly floated down, seeking in vain some meritorious head on which to alight.

The crowd was still plunged in delight and bliss when the Beast spat out her masterpiece, a mixture of Roman candles, phosphorous grenades, Catherine-wheels, fiery cascades, whistling bombs, and thunder-flashes. The whole made up a colourful, fulminating display, like an abstract painting, the symbols of which—a little confused, alas—were soon dispersed by the breeze.

It was time to stop. The exhausted Beast, almost empty, raked over her remaining embers and released a Bengal breeze, which gave off a very thick green smoke and a nauseating odour. Then, having coughed up a great heap of hot cinders, she made her way through the fair, swallowing as she went a block of nougat and a dozen balls from a catchpenny game, draining the public drinking-fountain in one gulp, and returned to the river, lame in one leg but murmuring contentedly: " Anyway, I'm glad I had a chance to discharge another fire."

The next day, weakened by these efforts and shaken by an ashy cough, the monster reached the rough waters of the Seine estuary. The strain of swimming on the surface was becoming too much for her; the depths of the channel attracted her more and more.

Léon, too, was exhausted; the exhilaration of the journey was giving way to fear, and this tumultuous water was more than a boy of his age, with all his thirst for adventure, could enjoy.

With silent accord, they made for a little deserted beach. The lowering sky was trailing thick clouds along the lonely river-banks.

The Seine was smiling no longer. The most beautiful and civilized river in the world chooses to finish her course in an austere and dangerous estuary like that of the great torrents. You can never tell to what coast the wandering Beast and the serpentine river will have led you—that is the secret of the future perfect.

In an emotional voice, which seemed to rise from her entrails like a submerged hunting-horn, the Beast expressed her gratitude to Léon, thanks to whom she would carry with her to the depths of the sea a nostalgia for mankind.

" I must return now to the sea which bore me," she murmured, " and perhaps an intensive resalting may restore to me my youth. One day we may meet again, God knows where and to the sound of what trumpets, but you need only whistle *Compère Guilleri* and I shall know that you need my help." The monster finished with a sigh so light that it barely stirred the dry sand where her muzzle lay, then opened her lids, and let a few of her moist facets glint.

" Right," said the boy in his thin voice. And laying his head on his arms, he let himself be borne away on waves of sleep.

When Léon awoke, the Mahoussian Beast had disappeared.

" Had she? " said Uncle Emile, who had listened with great interest to Léon's account of the voyage. " And you did not even hear her go? "

" I said that she had disappeared, " said Léon, " not that she had gone."

" There, it's beginning to get complicated again," said his uncle with a trace of impatience, but Léon explained that at the moment when he discovered the Beast's absence, a little butterfly was fluttering just above the place where she had been lying.

" A *butterfly*? " said Uncle Emile.

" Why, yes," said Léon. " I did explain to you that she's not bad at metamorphosis, and—"

" Yes, Léon, you did, but you can't get away with that."

" Well, it's easy to prove it. Look, there she is! She's followed me all the way back." A dun-coloured butterfly was skimming the ceiling, in a way that might have seemed quite normal for a butterfly, but after Léon's remark, it was not possible to look at it with indifference. Uncle Emile, his head raised, followed its flight closely, trying to make each swerve and zigzag reveal the symptoms of Mahoussian growth.

The butterfly flew down and alighted on a bottle, and the boy's uncle recoiled slightly. Vacillating on the neck of the bottle, it slowly opened and closed its wings. Then it lowered its head as if to fly down, and fixed its flat eyes on Uncle Emile.

Restraining a murderous impulse, he bent over the bottle and shouted at the insect in a threatening voice, " I've had about enough of these fairy-tales. Clear out! "

The creature, annoyed, flew out of the window, and Léon sadly shrugged his shoulders at this ridiculous display of anger. But his uncle was soon calm again.

" Very well! " he said. " I'll swallow your Mahoussian Beast—but the butterfly, no! You do what you like about it, as long as you don't mention it to me again. But one thing is certain— " and he pushed towards the boy his exercise book and the Latin primer—" one thing is certain, you will do your holiday task. Mahoussian butterflies are one thing, and your studies are another. And of course," he continued, leaning over his nephew's shoulder, " we are still at the same page, same exercise, the future perfect. *The nymphs will have loved the shadow of the woods.*

" It's a fine thing, an idle shirker like you trapesing round with a monster and then bringing back a butterfly under my roof—a perfectly ordinary butterfly—instead of learning this future perfect which is not so hard as all that, and which will be waiting for you every time you turn round, I warn you.

" Leave your things there, Touine will clear them up in the morning. We'll go to bed."

The uncle sent the boy upstairs, went to close the street door, put out the light, and then heard Léon calling in a timid voice from the top of the stairs: " Uncle Emile! "

" Eh? "

" The egg? "

" What egg? " said Uncle Emile, pretending not to understand.

" In the attic, you know . . ." said Léon, his throat very tight.

" You may well ask about the attic," said his uncle, coming upstairs. " I found it very untidy, all upside-down. But it won't happen again; I've put a strong padlock on the door. Now into bed with you, you rascal."

The boy was standing in the middle of his bedroom, staring at the electric bulb, round which a butterfly was fluttering. His uncle, waiting in the doorway, also watched the insect as it turned and turned again, like a mad little satellite.

After a moment he said gently, " Come, now, put that creature out of the window."

" Put it out yourself."

Uncle Emile pretended not to hear this, shrugged his shoulders, and told Léon to go to bed at once.

" Good night, you scapegrace. I want to hear your light go out in five minutes."

Having closed the door, Uncle Emile went to his own bedroom, removed his coat and shoes, and tried to direct his thoughts into their normal channels. But his thoughts would have none of it, and stayed idly in the alluring realm of the future perfect.

" Once you have known boys like that," he reflected, " you will have known everything."

Translated by D. H. R. BREARLEY

★ ★ ★

The difference between rates and taxes is that we pay our rates in sorrow and our taxes in anger.

Author Unknown

JESSICA ANN

Her haunting eyes seemed like speedwells in a summer meadow

by F. E. ELLWOOD

IN these more matter-of-fact days he might have been known as a manufacturing chemist, supplying his products on strict cash terms direct from factory to retailer. Not direct to consumers, for the witches of Netherfold sensibly insisted on an entirely closed shop and were more than usually convinced that the customer is always right.

From his factory in the little back room of his cottage under the willow tree, Ely Patchin, Purveyor to Witches, supplied his customers, all seven of them, with Asarrabacca, for Stupefying the Snakes; Tisane of Tansy, against Sundrie Paines in the Joynts; Conserve of Orrach and Greene Oyle of Charitie, Camomile, and Poppy-heads for Poultices; Butterwort, for Making the Haire Growe Golden; Hellebore, a Purgation for Mad and Furious Men . . . bottles, jars, pots, rows and rows of them, all suitably labelled, on the dusty shelves.

These for his customers' genial moods. But also Wolf's-bane, Henbane, Toadskins, Chicken Livers, Cockscombs, Pigs' Bristles, and Death-cap dried and stored in huge stone steans. And on a bench below the bottles were the balances, the stone distilling-jars with tubes and retorts, the pewter measures, mortars and pestles, and all the littered paraphernalia of Ely's profession.

Ely Patchin was busy. Sitting on a stool at the bench, he stirred the boiling mass of the Cordial Electuary of Hyssop Old Mother Harrow had ordered for the straightness of stomach of Farmer Watt's eldest girl, while Blackheart, Ely's white cat, watched impassively from the stone hearth. He poured the syrup into a gallipot and stirred it again. His thoughts were far from the work in hand.

Ely's work, in fact, had lost its savour. It was not that Ely had a painful conscience. The smallest budding sprout of a quite painless one would lose heart in the face of Ely's seven customers. True, it would be a fine thing to be independent. *E. Patchin, Apothecarie*, he thought, on a nice big board with the letters large in bright, new paint.

But there was no apothecary in Netherfold. Only seven witches,

distributing medicine and mischief with happy impartiality. And himself, their once-willing slave.

No, it wasn't conscience, except by proxy. For Jessica Ann, it appeared, had a conscience, and it was with Jessica Ann that Ely's thoughts were, this June morning.

He sighed. Jessica Ann had spoilt everything. Medicine, no mischief, she said, with the uncomfortable ruthlessness of all true reformers. And a wedding in the church with myrtle garlands and fine clothes, fiddles, bride-ale, and sack posset. In the *church*! Ely thought sometimes that Jessica lacked imagination. All of which brought him back to the work in hand.

Tomorrow was the witches' sabbath, and there was still the ointment to prepare, the ointment to anoint the bodies of Old Mother Harrow and her six colleagues, to enable them to fly on the backs of demon familiars to the Meeting-Place. He opened a drawer and shook out the folds of a dirty piece of paper. It was the recipe. Cinquefoil, mandrake root, it said, the blood of a flitter-mouse, and the toes of a corpse dug up at midnight, moon-shade, wolf's-bane, henbane, and oil. Ely knew it by heart, but a mistake was unthinkable, and with very good reason.

A tap on the back door, a shaft of dusty sunlight in the close little room, and a swift waft of scent from Ely's herb garden, from the unruly medley of marjoram and basil, rosemary and lad's love, from the jessamine and sweet brier spilling over the wall. And at the same time an earthy, dank smell from the fungus, carefully encouraged, growing on the dead stump of an oak tree near the back door.

"You, Jessica Ann." He reached down a jar from a shelf. It held a colourless liquid and a quantity of whitish objects.

"Me, Master Ely."

She smiled and swung her skirts towards the bench, hands on round, firm hips, small breasts high and tight like little oranges under her bodice. She had a dimple on her chin and her eyes seemed to those of Ely like speedwells in a summer meadow. Jessica Ann might be a reformer, but thank Satan, thought Ely, she doesn't look like one.

He looked at the jar and put it down with a shudder, then leaned with his hands on the bench.

"The wrong jar," he said. "Fingers. Whatever would become of me?"

"What *would* become of you?" said Jessica Ann curiously.

"Twice eye-bitten, thrice owl-blasted, seven times damned, and all," said Ely, "for you."

Jessica Ann tossed her straight black hair.

"*Them*," she said. "Mother Sprindle, no teeth and all smiles,

she comes to old Amos Hughes's when his boy fell off the stack over at Fourways. She first puts the salve on young Tom's back, and then she stops at the gate when she sees Amos's milking-goat behind the fence. And it seems she can't help it—all she does is touch it, and she's witched it."

Ely looked at her solemnly. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes were, after all, brighter than the speedwells.

"And old Mother Peasgood," said Jessica. "She cured Margie Boss's baby of her hacking cough o' nights, and then she saw their little dog. She gave it one look out of her evil eye and it started to run backwards, and backwards-way forwards it's been ever since. Now why, Ely, why?"

"The sabbath," said Ely absently. "They beat them."

"They?" said Jessica.

"The demons," said Ely, "at the Meeting. They beat the witches who cure the coughs and charm the warts. The ones who do the mischief, now, they're all right. But the ones who like a bit of both, like ours, they have to be careful. They daren't *not* touch the goat if they've done something they're going to be ashamed of. Things like mending young Tom's back or giving the mixture for Margie Boss's baby's cough."

Jessica looked thoughtful. She raised her dark lashes and looked sideways at Ely. "I've heard tell," she said, "that the Great Demon himself takes the Meeting. A big black, hairy fellow with the head of a goat. And hoofs, Ely. And they have wonderful things to eat, and wonderful things to drink, and oh Ely, the dancing and the whirling! And afterwards the devil men for the witches, and the devil women for the wizards. Oh," she sighed, "'tis evil they do, Ely Patchin."

"Yes, Jessica Ann," agreed Ely. "Evil it is."

"Think of it, Ely," said Jessica, encouraged. "The medicines for the sick and the poor. The secret recipes of the witches. We could burn the wicked ones, Ely. Just the two of us and no more of the witching. And we could be married, Ely. In the church, with a real wedding, and Parson saying words over us. Think of it now, Ely."

"Yes . ." said Ely, and he stopped, aghast. Reforming zeal and the lengths to which the zeal will go were new to Ely. He looked at Jessica anxiously, but she was still the same Jessica, and still very beautiful.

"B-but," he stammered at last, "it would mean *killing* them. Do you mean killing them, Jessica Ann?"

"But think of the good," said Jessica. "The poor folk of Netherfold. Little Amie Morris, the one who had a fit on her wedding-day and vomited the nails. Think of Tom Hesketh's

beer that never worked, old Hawkins's sheep sick of the giddies, and Betsy Selden's cows dry as the mugwort leaves in that bottle from the day she called Old Mother Emden the names . . ."

Ely looked troubled. "But not kill them, Jessica Ann? We could draw their blood," he said hopefully. "How does it go—? 'Tis drawing Blood from Dames like Witches Will forthwith Cure Them of Their Capriches?'"

"Vervain and dill fruit would do that just as well, I reckon," said Jessica, "and less trouble. 'Vervain and Dill, Vervain and Dill Hinders the Witches̄ from Their Will.' The stuff they take after the sabbath, Ely, you could put it in that?"

"The remedy against the Drunken Headache?" said Ely doubtfully. "Loloch of Coleworts? But they'd know it was me, and it would wear off, and what then, Jessica Ann?"

"It's rid of them once and for all," said Jessica firmly. "For the sake of the poor witched souls," she added piously. "And us, Ely. Don't you care about us, Ely?"

That night Ely Patchin stood at the window of his little front parlour and peered out through the shrouded darkness between the pots of herbs on the window-ledge. Now and again banks of cloud uncovered the quarter-moon, and a mist hid the pond and clung to the bushes and the low-hanging branches of the trees beyond. The willow tree over the cottage went drip, drip, drip. He looked down the lane towards Ellen Spindle's cottage. There was a faint glow round the chimney, and then in the darkness a sheep bleated, and another.

There was a movement now about Mother Spindle's chimney. A shape. A shadowy shape, then a definite shape. A demon goat—you could see its horns—there, outlined against the sky—and a human, a woman, a shape gleaming palely beneath a dark, draped shawl. The tops of the trees across the pond were swaying to and fro rhythmically, and the leaves rustled, dead as November.

A sudden cold rush of air, and creatures were beginning to rise from the mist, a bird with a goat's—no, a ram's—head, a shape like a lizard with wings, monstrous bats. Two lights shining in the branches. Glow-worms. No, eyes. Cat's eyes, luminous yellow in the darkness. Clouds had blacked out the moon again, and a sound that might be chanting, low yet shrill, came across the distances where the hell-born were carried above the trees and the rivers, the towns and the villages. And now overhead were other shapes. Bodies shining with the fearful ointment, astride the familiars, the owls, the hell-cats, here a sheep and there a dragon, sailing noiselessly through the night.

Ely shivered and drew back into the room. He shut the window

and lit the lamp. He took a quill and ink and a little black book from a drawer.

June the Twenty-first, he wrote slowly, his tongue protruding with concentration. *Tonight the Sabbath and my bloud run cold. The prettie Jessica Ann, what shall I doe, shee is the cabbage, the Floure of my herte so tendre is Shee, so Sore does shee grieve for the poore and the sicke. I am afeared. How can I fight with the Forces of Evill whose Slave I bee?*

He put down his pen and gazed for a long time at the dark window, then picked it up again. *But for Jessica, to fight with the Poysonsome Mushrome? Ten drachms eche with the Loloch?*

He put the quill down and let his mind dream of the happy state of affairs that might be brought about with so little trouble. The village happy, grateful.

Good morrow, Master Ely.

Good morrow, Maria Smith, and how is the little Ettie this morning?

Ah, well, Master Ely, all thanks to you. For lifting the curse from us, good Master Ely, may angels repay you . . .

All this, thought Ely, and the pretty Jessica too, speedwells, oranges, and all.

If onely, Ely confided to his book, *Jessica loved mee as I love her; I feare she loves but the Poore and the Sicke and Needie . . .*

Ely shut up his little black book with a sigh and prepared the Loloch of Coleworts for the Drunken Headaches his clients would certainly have next morning. A special Loloch that weighed seventy drachms more than usual; and when he had finished, he divided it up carefully into seven equal parts, tied up and labelled the little parcels, and left them ready for the morning. Then he went to bed.

They buried the seven witches face downwards in unhallowed ground near Dead Men's Crossroads, outside the village. Nobody had asked any questions, and nobody went to the burial. The bodies were wrapped in their owners' black shawls, and the bearers were hired from a neighbouring village.

Every cottage door in Netherfold was locked and the windows shuttered tight. Not a soul to be seen anywhere; and above every threshold were sprigs of valerian and bunches of garlic, and on the farms, nailed to each stable or cowhouse door, were sprays of honeysuckle and rowan boughs. No bell tolled from the locked and bolted church. Only silence and waiting.

The bearers returned, one by one the cottage doors were opened, valerian and garlic torn down, and the villagers stood in excited little groups discussing their new-born freedom.

A month later Ely married Jessica in the church. Jessica had her garlands and pipers and fiddlers, the paths were strewn with rosemary and rushes, and the villagers danced till dawn. And there was a sign nailed to an oak beam above the door of Ely's house. It read:

E. PATCHIN, APOTHECARIE
Sovrin Remedies for all Afflictiouns
No Charmes, No Spels

Trade was brisk, Ely made up the recipes and served the customers, Jessica Ann called on the sick. And on the night of July the Thirtieth, after the shop was closed and Jessica Ann had gone up to the little bedroom beneath the thatch, Ely took out his little black book.

Verie Happie, he wrote. *Today made a little Cake or Trochische of the Sow-bread which growes on the Hil for a Medicine for Jessica to insure she be in Love with mee. Sente a Tisané for Tommie Horrage. Am at a Losse to understande the Cace of Andrewe Watt his daughter Sarah afflicted with the Straightnes of Stomache, the stomache no better, and today shee vomited the Pins.*

Strange, thought Ely, and Mamie Clarke's hens all in a moult after he sent her the Birthwort juice for the chilblains. He sat and thought it all over a little longer and then gave it up. He put the black book away, extinguished the lamp, took off his shoes, and went softly upstairs. Jessica would not be expecting him yet, for this was the time when he prepared the simples for next morning; he smiled to himself at the idea of giving her a surprise.

But it was Ely who was surprised.

The door was slightly ajar and the lamp in the bedroom was unlit. A shaft of moonlight cut sharply across the floor and lit up the figure in the middle of the room. It was Jessica, shining palely in the cold white light, black straight hair falling round her bare shoulders, face intent. She was naked, and from a jar she was anointing herself, up and down, round and round, all over. At her feet sat Blackheart, watching every movement with interest.

Ely opened his mouth to speak and changed his mind. He crept downstairs, lit the lamp on the bench, and sat on the stool and thought. Then after a while he reached up to the shelf, hesitated, and took down a bottle.

A little while later he took out his little black book.

Have noe longer neede for the little Trochische I did make for the Amorous Medicin, he wrote. *Made a Potage of the Dill juyce insted with ten drachms of the Poysonsome Mushrome from the Oke tree. At laste understande the Cace of Andrewe Watt his girle.*

He looked dubiously at what he had written, then suddenly he tore the page out of the book. He stirred the dying fire and took

the little cake from the bench and threw it with the torn page into the coals. He sat thoughtfully, watching the cake shrivel and blacken, and the little blue flames lapping round the curled ash of the paper.

He tried to take stock of what had happened. Perhaps nothing at all had happened. No witching, Jessica had said. Perhaps what he had seen upstairs meant nothing. Play-acting, woman's curiosity; but then Ely remembered he knew nothing about women. And seven witches off the premises were of small account compared with just one right here at home. At his table. In his bed! Ely's scalp tingled at the thought. Better be on the safe side. Be able at least to hold his own, in case; and he suddenly remembered something.

He opened a drawer beneath the bench. Underneath a pile of straining-cloths and measures was a bundle of old books, given to him years ago by his predecessor, and long forgotten. He selected one and settled down to read.

"Ely," called Jessica an hour later. "Ely."

She came running down the stairs. She looked over his shoulder. *Sorcerie for Ye Verie Begynner,* she read.

He looked up, and she looked down, and she smiled.

"Well, Ely Patchin?" she said.

Ely stood up and smiled back at her uncertainly, shifting his feet on the floor. "Well, Jessica Ann?" he said.

"Come," said Jessica, moving through the parlour. She opened the front door and stooped to go through. Ely had never noticed before that she was so tall. He followed her nervously.

She was looking up at the sign, its brightly painted lettering shining in the moonlight. She glanced over her shoulder at Ely and stretching a long, sinewy arm, with one swift movement tore it down.

THE MASK

by STORM JAMESON

You will be spellbound by
this dramatic new love story
of the Carnival of Nice
by the author of
"The Hidden River"

IN ARGOSY NEXT MONTH

WEDDING BELLS

Spring with the lark, most comely bride, and meet
Your eager bridegroom with auspicious feet

ROBERT HERRICK

Now, now the joyfull marriage day draws on:
The Bride is busie, and the Bridegroom's gone
To call his fellow Princes to the feast:
The Garland's made; the Bridal Chamber's drest;
And Muses have consulted with the Graces,
To crown the day, and honor their embraces
With shadoe'd Epithalms: their warbling tongues
Are perfect in their new made Lyrick songs:
Hymen begins to grumble at delay,
And Bacchus laughs to think upon the day;
The virgin-tapers, and what other rights
Do appertain to Nuptial delights
Are all prepar'd, whereby may be exprest
The joyful triumph of this marriage-feast.

FRANCIS QUARLES,
Argalus and Parthenia, 1629

Marriage à la Mode

The Abbey was indeed thronged next day when Ethel and Bernard cantered up in a very fine carrage drawn by two prancing steeds who foamed a good deal. In the porch stood several clean altar boys who conducted the lucky pair up the aile while the organ pealed a merry blast. The mighty edifice was packed and seated in the front row was the Earl of Clincham looking very brisk as he was going to give Ethel away at the correct moment. Beside him sat Mr. Salteena all in black and looking bitterly sad and he ground his teeth as Ethel came marching up.

There were some merry hymns and as soon as Ethel and Bernard were one the clergyman began a sermon about Adam and Eve and the serpent and Mr. Salteena cried into his large handkerchief and the earl kept on nudging him as his sniffs were rarther loud. Then the wedding march pealed fourth and doun the church stepped Ethel and Bernard as husband and wife. Into the cab they got and speedelly dashed off to the Gaierty.

The wedding refreshments were indeed a treat to all and even Mr. Salteena cheered up when he beheld the wedding cake and sparkling wines. Then the earl got up and made a very fine speech about marrage vows and bliss and he quoted several good bits from the bible which got a lot of applause.

Bernard replied in good round terms. I thank your lordship for those kind remarks he said in clear tones I expect we shall be as happy as a lark and I hope you will all be ditto some day. Here Here muttered a stray lady in the crowd and down sat Bernard while Ethel went up to change her wedding garment for a choice pink velvit dress with a golden gurdle and a very chick tocque. Bernard also put on a new suit of blue stripe and some silk socks and clean under clothing. Hurah hurah shouted the guests as the pair reappeared in the aforesaid get-ups . . . Off drove the happy pair and the guests finished up the food.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

Well Groomed

Dear bride, remember, if you can,
The thing you married is a man.
His thoughts are low, his mind is earthy,
Of you he is totally unworthy;
Wherein lies a lesson too few have larnt it—
That's the reason you married him, aren't it?

OGDEN NASH

Bless the Bride

Meshed too was celebrating a wedding. A thud of drums and the sudden shrill notes of women came from the house . . . There was every sort of fashion in paint, green chins, green spots on the cheek, hair plastered to the forehead in a wave over one eye, tassels of many colours . . . and heavy silver collars.

The bride was in among them, sitting out her two days with a cloth over her head. She seemed very limp, weighted down by bracelets and huge anklets. Her yellow feet and hands were spread out to dry the henna patterns painted upon them, and the noise of the drums and the dancing of her friends were no doubt intended to keep her cheerful through this exhausting ceremony, with marriage to a perfect stranger at the end of it. Several of the ladies in the Hadhramaut have told me that they are happier on the whole after their first or second divorce.

FREYA STARK,
The Southern Gates of Arabia

Elopement

You will have heard of the sad misfortune that has happened to Lord Ilchester by his daughter's marriage with O'Brien the actor. The affair has been in train for 18 months, but it was not till about a week before the catastrophe that the family was apprised of the intrigue. Lord Cathcart went to Miss Read's, the paintress; she said softly to him, " My lord, there is a couple in the next room that I am sure ought not to be together, I wish your lordship would look in."

He did, shut the door again, and went directly and informed Lord Ilchester.

Lady Susan was examined, flung herself at her father's feet, confessed all, vowed to break off—but—what a *but!*—desired to see the loved object and take a last leave. Even this was granted. On Friday she came of age, and on Saturday morning —instead of being under lock and key in the country—walked down stairs, took her footman, said she was going to breakfast with Lady Sarah, but would call at Miss Read's; in the street, pretended to recollect a particular cap in which she was to be drawn, sent her footman back for it, whipped into a hackney-chair, was married at Covent-garden church, and set out for Mr. O'Brien's villa at Dunstable.

Poor Lord Ilchester is almost distracted; indeed it is the completion of disgrace—even a footman were preferable.

HORACE WALPOLE, *Letters*, 1764

Finale

The wedding now is fairly o'er,
The fees are paid, but nothing more;
The bridegroom swaggers foremost out,
He cocks his hat and looks about;
The piper plays for victory,
" I'll make thee fain to follow me."

In every room both high and low,
The fiddlers play, the bagpipes blow . . .
And thus the day in pleasure flies,
Till shining Phoebus quits the skies:
The gladsome night 'gins to approach;
But not one barrel left to broach.

EDWARD CHICKEN,
The Collier's Wedding, 1740

BLACK SABRE

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

August, 1805. *At Boulogne, excitement rises to fever pitch as Napoleon's massed army awaits the order to invade England. Panic strikes the camp when sentry after sentry is found murdered at night in the lighted enclosure around the Emperor's pavilion. The ghost killer, "Captain Cut-throat," is believed by Fouché, the Minister of Police, to be a British spy.*

At Fouché's orders, Alan Hepburn and his wife are being taken by coach to Boulogne guarded by Captain Guy Mercier of the Mounted Guides, and the voluptuous Ida de Sainte-Elme, agent of Fouché, and until recently Alan's mistress.

Ida had unmasked the fashionable Vicomte de Bergerac as none other than Alan Hepburn, British agent and sworn enemy of France. Fouché had arrested Alan secretly: already in Fouché's clutches was Madeleine Lenormand, Alan's lovely French wife whom he had deserted in London on being warned (falsely) that she was spying for France. Fouché had offered Alan his life if he would go to Boulogne, enter the camp as Vicomte de Bergerac, and track down Captain Cut-throat. Madeleine had urged Alan to die rather than aid Fouché, but Alan disclosed to her that he must get to Boulogne to pass on vital information.

As the coach hurtles on, Alan attempts to persuade Mercier to disregard Fouché's orders to drug him at night with laudanum, divulging that he suspects Cut-throat to be a leader of the French

secret society, the Olympians, and that the killer may be a hireling —possibly Lt. Hans Schneider, the blade of whose blackened sabre he had glimpsed in a brawl.

At night, outside the fenced enclosure lit by reflector-lamps, Alan is convinced that a dark figure could stand unseen and through the palings stab a sentry, with the straight, blackened blade of his sabre, while guards inside would be deceived by the reflectors into believing that they could see beyond the lighted enclosure. Schneider of the Hussars of Bercy (the only cavalry regiment to wear a straight sabre such as the killer might have used) is a quarrelsome braggart, who at Boulogne had severely wounded a grènadier, Jules Dupont.

Schneider is riding after the coach as armed escort to prevent Alan's escape. It dashes past a carriage guarded by Cuirassiers. Alan spies Talleyrand inside, and knows instantly that at Boulogne great events—perhaps invasion—must be afoot. The Emperor's massed balloons are fully inflated—mysterious lights are moving away southward.

Nearing the camp, the coach arrives at its destination, the château in the Park of Thirty Statues, where Fouché's châtelaine, the so-called Duchess, insists that her "guests" sit down immediately to dine. It is at the end of dinner that events suddenly take a new and sinister turn . . .

DING, rapped the little marble clock, on the first stroke of eleven. Ding! Ding! Ding!

Madeleine, in her feverish haste, scarcely glanced at the clock on the white marble mantelpiece in the bedroom. Whatever happened at Boulogne tonight, it could not happen for a few hours yet. But that was not her immediate concern.

Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding! A puff of wind stirred the curtains, heavy dark blue velvet bordered in gold, on full-length windows in this ornate jewel-box of a bedroom, with its gilt-and-white furniture and its wallpaper in vertical stripes of blue and white. Over the bed, in its alcove, hung a bronze medallion-head of the Emperor. Everywhere was the unseen presence of the sharp-eyed Emperor.

It had been the same ever since they arrived. At Pont-de-Briques they had seen nobody on the road except a courier of the Mounted Guides, bent low and galloping hard with a dispatch, yet the air quivered to an omnipresent sense of waiting.

At the gate of the park they had passed two grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, burly men distinguished by the bearskin hats they wore; each man rigid before a sentry-box under a lighted gate-lamp on either side of the entrance. These sentries stood immovable as the statues beyond them, until they recognized Mercier and brought their muskets to salute.

The coach had moved on up a gravel drive lined with statues of figures from classical mythology until it finally swung round in the

grass courtyard of a small château built round three sides of a square, its roof of slate, and its long window-frames painted white. In the courtyard a fountain splashed and glimmered in light from the open doorway, where the Duchess had been waiting to greet them.

" The Vicomte de Bergerac? " she had intoned. " Madame Ida de Sainte-Elme? Captain Guy Mercier? And "—here Madeleine had started—" Mademoiselle Madeleine Lenormand? "

After dinner, Ida and Madeleine had gone upstairs in silence. It was Madeleine who secured first use of the copper bathtub: the only one she had ever seen in her life into which hot water flowed through pipes.

Saying not a word, the stormy-faced Ida watched her, assessing her carefully in the water. Madeleine, though defiant and not at all unwilling to be assessed, had nevertheless made haste through the process because at all costs she must be dressed long before Ida.

If her plan succeeded! If it succeeded, as it certainly must!

Ding, ding, ding, rapped the clock on the last stroke of eleven. It whirred in its throat and was still.

Madeleine, listening so tensely for some word from Ida in the adjoining dressing-room, had forgotten to make haste at all. Standing motionless in the blue-and-white bedroom, she still wore nothing except the silk stockings, fastened with buckled garters, and the flat, heelless evening-shoes of satin—hers were coloured blue—which the year's fashion dictated.

She must hurry and hurry, hurry!

The remainder of her dressing was not a complicated process: she had only to draw over her head a low-cut evening-gown of blue bordered in white, and dust a little rice-powder on her face and arms and shoulders. But dressing her hair before a full-length mirror took much longer. Madeleine breathed deeply, while her pulses hammered and the seconds ticked past . . .

There were three hollow knocks at the door to the corridor. The door opened. The Duchess herself, large, impressive, and much decorated with dubious jewels, moved in amid trailing draperies.

" If you are provided with everything you desire," said the Duchess, pointing one finger ceilingward, " I shall take my leave and retire to my couch. What a day! Ah, mon dieu, what a day! If the Emperor himself were to call tonight . . ."

" The Emperor? " exclaimed Madeleine, turning round from the mirror. " Is the Emperor likely to visit here? "

" Today," the Duchess assured her, " he is at the Château of Pont-de-Briques; but his presence anywhere near disturbs me.

" All day, they say," pursued the Duchess, " he walks up and down the balcony, dictating to General Duroc. And the cocked hats of his marshals crowd round him and crowd closer! What with all the excitement in camp today over Captain Cut-throat, and now this silence—silence, silence, silence—I am frightened and I wish myself back in Marseilles."

Drawing a deep breath, and making a broad gesture as though

trying hard to dismiss this, she studied Madeleine for some moments.

"Ma petite," she said in a somewhat different voice, "about your lover . . ."

"My lover?"

"Come, my dear!" cried the Duchess. "It leaps to the eye that for this occasion you are the little friend of the Vicomte de Bergerac, eh? And I, being a woman of good heart, it desolates me that I am unable to put you in the same room. But we are servants of the Emperor; always, always, always it is necessary to have dignity; and how I wish, in this world of ill-breeding, that others would remember as much!

"You asked me a moment ago," swept on the Duchess, "whether the Emperor might call here.

"His Majesty *did* call here. It was upon the occasion of a visit paid to us two days ago by the American envoy and his wife, a Meester and Meessus Opévell, of the city of Philadelphia."

The shock of hearing a certain name, amid all her other perplexities, drove the blood from Madeleine's heart and brought more difficulties to thicken and stab.

"Did you say Hopewell?" she cried. "A Mr. and Mrs. Gideon Hopewell? Formerly attached to the American Ministry in London?"

The Duchess considered this. "Of the first name I am not sure. And London? Bah! Madame Hopewell is a lady—the most charming, who in private asks me many questions about my profession—for I would inform you that I was once the owner of the most esteemed tolerance-house in all Marseilles, with my girls everywhere known as the most agreeable and the most ladylike—Meessus Opevell is altogether genteel. Her husband . . ."

"A rather portly, middle-aged man? *Gideon* Hopewell?"

"Ah! He is in truth distinguished-looking, like my first-class clients in the old days. But stern? Oo la la! I tell you, when the Emperor was here . . ."

"But they've gone, haven't they? They're not here now?"

"Am I not telling you, mā petite? They have gone only for one night, so that Monsieur Opevell may inspect some new guns. They return at any moment, perhaps tonight. That is why, even putting aside instructions from Monsieur Fouché, I could not allow myself to admit you to the same room as the Vicomte."

Madeleine, her back to the mirror and her hands pressed under her eyes, stood motionless. When all Whig doors in London were open to Gideon Hopewell and his wife, because the buff and blue of the Whig colours had been adopted from the buff and blue of General Washington's army at the time of the Rebellion, both Madeleine and Alan had met the Hopewells everywhere. If Lucy Hopewell at least could be warned now, and told beforehand, they might well keep silent. But if unexpectedly, here at Pont-de-Briques, they encountered the Vicomte de Bergerac and Mademoiselle Madeleine Lenormand—

Madeleine had no opportunity to think of the Hopewells or, in fact, of anything except Ida de Sainte-Elme. For the partly-open door to the dressing-room opened fully, Ida sauntered in, and the emotional temperature of the room soared.

Tonight Ida wore another gauzy and transparent gown trailing the floor, this time of a jonquil-yellow colour. Underneath it she had discarded her buskins for gold-hued slippers and for an even narrower flower-girdle of scarlet roses. Her glossy black hair was done up into its topknot curls and bound with a gold fillet. Bedecked, bedizened, and resplendent in her self-confidence, she exuded the very odour of feminine triumph.

Scarcely troubling to glance at Madeleine, she picked up a heavy, gold-backed hand-mirror from the dressing-table. She regarded herself this way and that, moving her mouth. She smiled slightly. Then she lowered the mirror and looked at the Duchess with detached contempt. "Get out," she said curtly. "Get out, you filthy old bawd."

Remembering the Duchess's past profession, Madeleine expected a mighty wrath to burst in reply. And yet, before Ida's self-assurance and glory, the Duchess's big face suddenly sagged and retreated and crumpled up. With horrifying grotesqueness, as though a tower had fallen, she blundered against the door and attempted to bob a curtsy, as she backed her way out.

Madeleine sensed the terrifying insecurity behind all the Duchess's ranting talk, like the insecurity in France itself as the threat of the Emperor hovered like a hawk over Europe.

"Had you any reason on earth," Madeleine cried out, "to speak to the woman like that? And haven't you a most astonishing nerve, Ida de Sainte-Elme, to call any woman what you actually are yourself?"

Ida, who had been staring at the closed door, whirled round. Nostrils dilated, eyes widening, she looked at her companion; and Madeleine, with only a heightening and intensifying of the same emotions, looked back.

"I think, Madame Hepburn," said Ida in a high voice, "it is time we settled certain matters between ourselves."

Ida flew back to the door and twisted the key in the lock. Snatching out the key, she set her back against the door.

"Lock it!" said Madeleine. "Yes, lock it, by all means! Do you imagine it will do you any good?"

"Yes, I am sure it will," said Ida, with ferocious sweetness. "Tell me, Madame Hepburn: how do you feel?"

"Very, very well indeed!" said Madeleine. "I can seldom remember feeling better in my life. How do *you* feel?"

"Meaning—?"

"Corporal Chavasse was right in every word he said!" exclaimed Madeleine. "You don't want Alan! You never did want him."

"Corporal Chavasse? And, pray, who is he?"

"You know very well who he is. I heard him tell the Minister of Police the real truth about you. Your vanity was just scratched

raw when Alan said he would rather have me than have you, and you swore to get level with me if it was the last thing you ever did. Do you think I don't know," said Madeleine, " that you stole the laudanum out of Captain Mercier's sabretache last night? "

Ida, though staring at her hard and strangely, did not move from the door.

" And who," demanded Ida, " told *you* about the laudanum? "

" Nobody told me. Nobody needed to tell me. Anyone would have seen it as soon as you grew so crudely amorous with Captain Mercier."

" You *dare* say to me . . ."

" Dare, madame? I'll challenge you at wits and at any of your other pleasures too! The laudanum was in that sabretache at his left side as you faced him. It was dark in the coach and jolting so much he'd never have noticed if you opened the pouch. You didn't dare steal the whole laudanum bottle, in case he missed it. But the brandy was gone from that little flask in your reticule, so you poured all the laudanum you needed into the flask. *Didn't you?*

" If you drugged my coffee after dinner, and then drugged Captain Mercier's coffee too, you could have all the time you wanted alone with Alan, and get your best possible revenge by humiliating me! "

Madeleine, in a paroxysm of rage and with her blonde beauty flushed to loveliness, took a step forward.

" Oh, you'd never have risked Alan getting out of this house! " she cried. " You're too fanatically loyal to the Emperor; you worship war just as he does. You'd never have risked drugging Captain Mercier, and letting Alan get out to discover the invasion plans, unless you knew it was perfectly safe. But there's another officer following us, isn't there? And he's been following us all the way from Paris? And he'll do his best to kill Alan and rouse the whole camp, won't he, if Alan tries to leave the house? So you knew it was safe. And that's what you did, isn't it? "

Ida threw back her head and laughed. " Yes, of course I did! " she said with exultant triumph. " And tomorrow you'll understand how easy it is to make any man forget you. I've been waiting, and listening patiently to your raving, so that I could watch the symptoms coming on. Don't you feel the giddiness in your head and legs? You drank the coffee, you know! "

" Oh no! " said Madeleine. " You drank it yourself."

Ida straightened up violently. " *What . . . clumsy . . . lie . . .?* "

" You drank it yourself, I tell you! " said Madeleine, stamping her foot. " I changed the cups when you were so occupied with Alan. And, what's more, you can tell it's true! You thought it was only the heat of the bath making you giddy, but you know now it's not that at all! Don't you? "

Ida sprang forward, whirling up the heavy hand-mirror. But she had to catch herself, with panic in her eyes, to keep her balance. Spreading both arms wide, arching her back, she fell against the door.

The mirror dropped from one of her hands. The key dropped from the other. Lightning dazzled beyond the swirling window-curtains; the candle-flames flickered, and thunder shocked distantly with the onrush of the approaching storm.

That same distant rumble of thunder, heard by Madeleine in the perfumed bedroom, was also heard by Alan Hepburn downstairs.

In the large, lofty dining-room at the front of the northern wing, there was a scene just as wild but to Alan completely mysterious. The furniture of the dining-room, of heavy and polished black wood inlaid with designs of yellowish metal, stood out in sombre vividness against a crimson carpet and against high window-curtains of dull scarlet and gold. Captain Guy Mercier sprawled face downwards across the refectory table, sitting there as though dead drunk. His right hand lay near an overturned brandy-glass, and the right side of his face rested against a crushed bunch of grapes. It was twenty seconds since his sabre had bumped and stayed motionless against the floor.

Alan, with a brandy-glass in his own hand, was standing up on the other side of the table, and looking at his companion in stark incredulity.

" Mercier! " he called sharply, putting down his glass after still more seconds had elapsed. " Mercier! What the devil's the matter with you? Mercier! "

There was no reply.

Alan hurried round to the other side of the table. He lifted the left eyelid of the unconscious man. Though the eyeball rolled up, he saw that the pupil had shrunk to the size of a pin-head.

Bending down quickly, he unfastened the catch of Mercier's leather sabretache, took out a brown glass bottle of dark-brown liquid, and held it up to the light. Enough laudanum was gone from the bottle to do more than render a man insensible. Carelessly used, it would have poisoned him as well.

The curtains here had been not quite drawn. The whole dining-room went deathly white with lightning; another rumble of thunder, striking closer yet, set vibrating the gold dinner-service and the frame of a portrait over the sideboard. Alan hastily thrust the bottle back into the sabretache, removed from that pouch the map Mercier had taken from him in the coach, put it in his pocket, and then stood up straight, listening.

There was not a sound in the house. Not a sound.

The Duchess had said she was going to bed some time ago; the servants, she had proclaimed, were already abed, with the exception of a liveried manservant named Victor, who had tended once or twice to become talkative during dinner and who, the Duchess announced, would attend to anything the gentlemen might require.

" Ah, my lord viscount," he could still hear Victor's voice, " now that the authorities have seen fit to act in this matter of Captain Cut-throat: depend on it, my lord, they will deal with the English frigate, which every day sails in during the morning or the

evening, and insults our good men to frenzy by thumbing its nose at the shore batteries, and sails out again without firing a shot. If they cannot spare ships of the line, at least there are enough Imperial gunboats!" . . . Alan threw the memory away.

Diving underneath the table, where Mercier had tactfully concealed the pistol which was never very far from him, Alan made it harmless by blowing the loose powder out of the firing-pan, and then replaced it. Next he hastily unbuckled and removed Mercier's sword-belt. What a piece of good fortune, he thought! Whoever drugged Mercier, wittingly or unwittingly, had done more for him than all of His Britannic Majesty's secret agents put together. He was about to buckle on the sword-belt when he hesitated, and placed it instead on a chair. If the inquisitive Victor were still about . . .

Alan turned towards the sideboard, and his gaze automatically lifted to the big portrait above it. It was a portrait of the Emperor. Here at the Park of Statues, or anywhere within reach of the little autocrat's hand, no visitor could expect any other portrait. And Alan Hepburn knew that every moment of his own worthless life had been leading up to this night, to the 23rd of August 1805. All the thoughts and feelings that rose up in him as he saw the portrait could have taken shape in one fierce and silent heart-cry.

Boney had been stopped.

A heavy crash of thunder, exploding close over the house, rattled the picture-frame and split into tumbling echoes down the sky. The glare of lightning that preceded it, the jump of the candle-flames immediately following brought out all the shadings of the portrait above gold plate on the sideboard. It showed the Emperor on his white horse Marengo, which was rearing up on its hind legs while the Emperor stood in the stirrups, his eyes blazing wide, and pointed up a finger dramatically at painted lightning in the sky.

And yet Boney had been stopped.

No, Alan corrected himself bitterly: no, it would be foolish even to think that. Undoubtedly, Boney's greatest victories were yet to come; his star was still in the ascendant; perhaps he could never lose. But Alan, remembering the crawling line of light he himself had seen in the Forest of Boulogne on the road to St. Omer and Lille, would have staked everything on one belief.

Boney could never invade England now.

The actual length of time in which Alan stood looking up at that portrait, measured by the clock, was only the few seconds while the reverberations of the thunder-peal died away. But in those few seconds he examined thoughts at which he had not even dared to look too closely as yet, including the real reason why he was here in Boulogne. And all these images still resolved themselves into a picture of Boney—on a white horse.

The Emperor had made only one blunder: he had always been contemptuous of naval tactics, and thought it a simple matter to use them. On August 8th, elated by Admiral Villeneuve's apparent victory over Calder, the Emperor had triumphantly ordered

Villeneuve to sail north, join Admirals Ganteaume and Allemand, and hold the Channel for the crossing of the Grand Army.

But the practical-minded Villeneuve, then at Vigo Bay with the Spanish Admiral Gravina, and their large but ill-trained fleet, knew better than the Emperor what he could do and could not do. He obeyed orders and set out, though he quickly learnt what had happened.

Straight in his path was gathering the whole British Channel Fleet: twenty-seven sail of the line, including ten three-deckers, and now joined by Nelson with twelve ships more. At any moment Villeneuve feared to raise their topsails and sight the dreaded Cross of St. George. Villeneuve altered his course and took refuge in the port of Ferrol; against such a fleet he could do nothing else; his dispatch informing the Emperor of his decision reached Boulogne as early as the 14th August—And most of these dispatches were being intercepted, before they were sent on again, by the British espionage system in France.

The Grand Design was smashed, the invasion in ruins.

True, it was a check only to the Emperor's sea tactics. He would not wait idle at Boulogne. Everywhere the earth was humming, the semaphore-arms clacking like an articulate gallows with news of an outbreak in Europe at the Emperor's back.

To Alan, and Alan's colleagues in Paris, this fresh news ten days ago was as surprising as it was surprising to William Pitt in the map-room at Whitehall. So far the Emperor of Austria and the Czar of Russia, apprehensive of the Emperor, refused to stir against him. In a decision made almost overnight, they had changed their minds: Austria and Russia were now pledged to strike westward into France.

Unfortunately, this news could not fail to be known to Boney. If he had decided he could not invade Britain, it must have been just what his heart most desired. To swing round his mighty forces, to outwit Austrian and Russian commanders in the kind of campaign of which he was supreme master, to march with the Grand Army, first behind the advancing Austrians in a thrust at Vienna; then, perhaps, to cut between two armies and defeat the other enemy at his leisure . . .

If the Emperor meant to take this course . . .

Alan, more moved than he knew, was astounded to hear himself speaking aloud. "By God!" he muttered, and half lifted the sabre. "If I can prove tonight in Boulogne Forest what I am near certain is true; and tomorrow, with luck, get the news out of this camp to London! If the cursed, slow-moving Austrians can be warned in time that Boney in person is counter-marching against them! If I can verify the facts, send that message safely, and still get out of this scrape alive, with Madeleine and a new life . . ."

But that was the trouble. He himself was probably finished; he knew that. His chances of getting out alive were almost as remote as those of Boney dining at Buckingham House next week.

Against him, from the beginning, Joseph Fouché had been playing a game that was unlikely to fail. Any move he made would be countered by a more adroit move from the wily Minister of Police.

In Paris, when he had deliberately got himself arrested for a very good reason, he thought he could face it. But that was before he had known about Madeleine.

Madeleine! He could still save *her*, or believed he could. But to lose her now, when all his jealousy in the past had been insane self-delusion and nonsense . . .

More thunder shocked out across the Park of Statues. As it did so, Alan heard a heavy thump behind him, and turned round.

The inert figure of Captain Guy Mercier had slipped sideways out of the chair and sprawled on the crimson carpet beside the table. Involuntarily Alan looked across the table towards the large double doors of the dining-room.

Madeleine herself, as though conjured there by his imagination, was just closing one of the double doors. Wrenched out of despair in this particular way, he could only stand and stare at her.

"What is it?" she asked instantly, and in English.

"I was thinking, Madeleine, that it's damned funny."

"What is funny? What are you thinking?"

"I was considering the map of Europe and all the kingdoms on it. I was weighing men and guns and the blood that will be spilt for nothing. But mostly I was thinking that I love you."

"Don't ever stop, then," said Madeleine. "Don't ever, ever stop!" And she ran towards him.

What these two said or did, during the next few minutes of frantic and broken endearments, should not matter to a story which concerns men and guns and the map of Europe. They spoke in English, perhaps incautiously; but they did not speak much, and, while they were speaking, the skies opened and the rain tore down and roared round the house.

Still, whether or not their state of mind was of much consequence set against the towering portrait of the Emperor, it mattered very much to them. It was only after some time that Alan, conscious of minutes ticking past and of a mission in the Forest of Boulogne, began to babble of this to her; and Madeleine, he realized, was babbling to him some incoherent words about Ida.

The realization of what it meant shocked him fully awake. "Then *both* guards are out of it?"

"Both of them are insensible, yes! I—I managed to lift Ida up and put her in bed as though she were naturally asleep. Afterwards, I locked the bedroom door on the outside. Here!" Moving back from him, Madeleine held out the key in the palm of her hand.

"Just before Ida collapsed," Madeleine went on, "she said 'You damned traitor and spy, I'll tell the Emperor himself about you; that's what I meant to do at first.' I never thought of it before, Alan, but she was right; that's just what I am; and I don't care in the least. Alan!—

" There was something I wanted to ask you in the Room of Mirrors, and on my life I couldn't! But I can ask you now. If you would let me help you in all this . . . Let me think I'm essential to you and a part of your life, which is what I could never think in the past . . ."

" Madeleine," he said: " If you really mean what you say . . ."

" I do! You must know I do! "

" Then keep that key you have." His voice grew sharp and intense. " Now, don't ask questions; but remember everything I tell you. Each evening now—don't ask me how or why—a small boat from England will touch at the coast here, just an hour after sunset. It will put in near the village of Condette, where there are sand dunes, just beside an inn, at the Sign of the Sleeping Cat. You can easily walk to it from where we are now. The inn is kept by smugglers," he continued, " who don't give a curse about the war, provided only it goes on and furnishes them with business. With good fortune, both you and I shall be able to leave in that boat tomorrow night. But if anything should happen and I am unable to be there . . ." The apprehension in her eyes was almost terrifying; he flinched from it.

" I merely mean," he said patiently, " that I may be delayed. In that case, the boat will return for me on the following night. Whatever happens, you must promise to be in that boat when it leaves tomorrow. There is not time to explain much more, because I must leave the Park of Statues for a little while tonight . . ."

" You mustn't leave this house," Madeleine burst out, " or you will run into the worst trouble of all! I *know* you want to discover the invasion plans . . ."

" Death and damnation, will you be silent and listen to me? " He was white to the lips; she shrank back from him.

" It is a thousand to one against there ever being an invasion of England at all. Tonight, from the coach, we saw a mile of dim lights moving along the road through the Forest of Boulogne. Boney, without any of his usual band-music, is secretly moving out a very large body of troops or equipment of some kind. Mercier saw that; and he was so paralysed with astonishment he tried to throw me off the scent by suggesting it was part of the invasion of England.

" If Boney is moving out his artillery days and days ahead of his main body of troops—hang it, he can't even have completed his plan of campaign yet; that's why he was dictating on the balcony at the château today—then this moving of guns is no feint or manœuvre. Guns mean a full-scale attack."

" And everything else? "

" Everything else," said Alan, " is a feint to hoodwink the world that he still means to invade England. The column of troops, whatever it was, will have passed through the forest long ago. But one look at that road, if it's rutted with the tracks of light and heavy guns, will tell me whether I'm right. It will prove—" He stopped abruptly, because of the expression on Madeleine's face.

" And this is the information," she asked, " you must take back to London in such haste? "

" Yes."

" Alan, don't lie to me. You say you may be ' delayed,' and you may not be in time to go with that boat. But, if this information is so vital, mustn't you be there at all costs to take back the news? "

" I am bound to warn you, my dear, the boat may not be able to reach here at all. That was why we had to devise a means of sending a message even if I never left France or—" Again he stopped, trying in vain mentally to drag back the words. He had gone too far, blurted out too much; and he saw her eyes as he said it.

" Then you *are* going to send a message out of the camp! " said Madeleine, with a tense and quivering calmness. " The very thing Captain Mercier said you couldn't do! How? I ask you because I can face anything, anything, if only I know the extent of the danger and what it is you have to risk. How, Alan? Tell me! "

" It's not at all difficult," he answered, with fear growing inside him as he spoke, " but I can only hope I don't lose my nerve at the crucial moment. The method, you see, is . . ."

Neither of them had heard the double doors of the dining-room open on the far side of the long table.

The inquisitive footman Victor was standing there and looking at them. Tall and impressive in his green-and-gold livery, except for a look of slyness which darted and was gone from the dark eyes on either side of his large, Casanova-like nose.

Bowing with a somewhat ironical respect, Victor spoke easily and fluently. " My lord viscount desires something, perhaps? "

But this time, mockingly, he spoke in English.

This was the moment at which Alan might have felt his courage begin to waver, if one glance at Madeleine had not given him heart. For Madeleine, very proud and exultantly happy in her new role as his confederate, had not faltered for an instant. He realized what an actress the superb little devil could be when she thought she had reason for trying! They could have made a team to meet even Joseph Fouché on equal terms!

Madeleine, chin slightly raised and with a languid smile, continued in English as though it were the most natural course in the world. " Indeed my lord viscount did ring! " said Madeleine, with a little shiver and an outward twitch of her fingers. " Poor Captain Mercier, I fear, has become most revoltingly intoxicated."

" Ah, Miss Lenormand," cried Victor, at his most expansive, " that happens to all the gentlemen, and especially to those who visit us here at the Park of Statues. You would wish me to carry the gallant captain up to his bed, perhaps? "

" You speak English very well, Victor."

" I was about to compliment Miss Lenormand, if I may be permitted to do so, on her own accomplishment in that respect."

" The Vicomte and I," smiled Madeleine, " have been practising very hard for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Hopewell."

Mr. and Mrs. Hopewell? Alan turned round to meet Madeleine's significant smile. Victor's eyes, swivelling on either side of his Casanova nose, moved shrewdly in watchfulness.

"I do not think," Madeleine was saying loudly to Alan, "you have met Mr. and Mrs. Gideon Hopewell. They have been here at the Park of Statues for two days, and are expected back tonight."

Alan, his scalp tingling at the imminence of danger, knew he could not afford to delay much longer. He must hurry, taking his directions in pitch darkness by the lights at the Field of the Balloons.

Victor, sidling round the table like a big dancing-master, bowed and knelt by Mercier's recumbent figure. "If Miss Lenormand will allow me," he said, "I shall—"

Then, as more thunder tore through the screen of the rain, the whole scene changed. Victor's right hand went under the table, and caught up Mercier's pistol from the crimson carpet. Up to his feet leapt Victor, the pistol muzzle levelled at Alan.

"Stand still, Mr. Hepburn!" he said in English.

There was a hiss and slither as Alan whipped the curved sabre out of its scabbard.

Bright steel glittered level with the pistol muzzle, point presented to it like another pistol. Victor, his legs shuttling so that the brass buckles twinkled on his big shoes, backed away very fast round the dining-room table, the pistol still levelled. "I am the Minister of Police's representative in this house. A special courier on horseback, from Fouché himself, arrived here at the Park of Statues on Monday night at ten o'clock precisely on his way to the Château of Pont-de-Briques. He carried a message for the Emperor and General Savary, telling them that Captain Cut-throat was an unknown Englishman—*in fact, yourself, Mr. Hepburn, you yourself are Captain Cut-throat!*"

Alan, saying not a word, still followed him with the sabre ready.

Victor pulled the trigger. The resultant noise, only a sharp click, was blotted out by thunder. Alan's right arm swept out and up as he lunged forward, the blade flashing high.

Victor dodged by instinct, but it was not necessary. The sabre blade whistled above his head. It severed the heavy bell-rope high out of Victor's reach, so that the rest of the rope thumped down, half coiled, on the carpet behind him.

Then Alan darted back, sabre at guard position and scabbard in his left hand. "*You* stand still," he said softly. "Madeleine! Can you tie his hands with that bell-rope? The walls of this house are stone, and there's a cupboard here in the dining-room. No, stop! There's not enough rope to tie him completely, and we haven't a gag."

"Oh yes, we have!" said Madeleine. She ran to the table, snatched up a sharp knife from amid the litter, and ran to Alan's side. Catching up her elegant Parisian gown, she slashed deeply into the hem and began to rip the silk in sideways swathes to make both ropes and a gag.

What we all do or say or think, under the wildness of heightened feelings, follows no established rule; we blurt out our innermost thought, and remember it afterwards only with astonishment. What flashed into Alan Hepburn's mind, and what he said instinctively, without even stopping to think, was what he would never otherwise have dreamt of saying in public.

"Damme, madam," he yelled, "are you clad in nothing whatsoever under that gown, without so much as a shift to your name? Must you disport yourself before every man's eye in a condition even more naked than Ida de Sainte-Elme herself?"

"Alan, we are not in England now! It is the custom in Paris. I am only—"

Victor, who had lost none of his alertness and little of his courage, sprang straight for Alan's throat.

Out flashed the blade with such eye-wink speed that Victor hardly saw it before the razor-edge slashed a patch from the side of his wig, without even touching the hair underneath; without more than crushing and grotesquely crumpling the curls of the wig over his right ear. And Victor, halted in mid-flight with sweat-drops starting out on his forehead, stood still with the breath stuck in his throat.

"Don't do that again," warned the civilian épée-and-sabre champion of France, "or I'll cut to hurt you. Madeleine, pray accept my apologies and oblige me by appearing publicly in as naked a condition as you please. Meanwhile, madam, for heaven's sake cut up your skirt and tie him!"

Alan whipped the sword-blade high.

"Down on the carpet, do you hear me? Madeleine! The ropes and the gag!"

"*You are Captain Cut-throat, Mr. Hepburn!*"

To Madeleine, with those words ringing in her head, came the prospect of a worse nightmare than she had known forty-eight hours ago in the office of Joseph Fouché. Her body went limp, and the knife wobbled in her hand.

"Madeleine! The ropes and gag! *Madeleine!*" Pale as a ghost, she hastened to obey.

"No, wait!" Alan said feverishly. "There is a better way than that. Gag him; tie his arms and hands behind him; but leave his legs free. He can walk upstairs ahead of us. I'll carry Mercier. We'll lock both of them in the room Mercier and I were to occupy. Quickly, now; and upstairs!"

Again, measured in time, by the clock, it was little more than five minutes before these two hurried conspirators were alone together as the clocks struck midnight.

"Alan, about what Victor was saying . . ."

"Don't speak of that! Don't even think of it!"

"You *can't* be Captain Cut-throat!"

"Then be resolute in your belief. It's their pleasant game to drive me into just that corner, and my game to keep out of it if I can"

" Then all the time they've been intending to accuse *you*? "

" While I'm gone," he swept this aside, " lock yourself in the bedroom; blow out the lights if you feel up to it, but at least don't attract attention, whatever you do. I have only to send my message to England tomorrow . . . Boney's plans are the most vital news of all the war; and it is worth any method we use."

Alan's voice, gnawed with anxiety, grew harder yet. " I'm certain Fouché himself doesn't suspect it. I only hope Victor hasn't come to suspect it somehow. If he has— But it may only have been an accident when he mentioned that ship."

" Ship? What ship? " Madeleine said fiercely.

Alan drew a deep breath. " Every day for some time past," he said, " the forty-four-gun frigate *Medusa* has been appearing off Boulogne and sailing straight at the harbour mouth. That was to get the French accustomed to her. *Medusa*'s only apparent purpose is to insult the shore batteries. The French see nothing strange in it; it's the sort of gesture they would dearly love to make themselves. But our own staid Lords of the Admiralty would never permit such useless heroics without a good purpose. As a rule you can sight that ship either between five and six in the afternoon or between ten o'clock and noon in the morning. *Medusa* has been ordered never to fire a shot; and her captain is so disgusted that he won't even break out his colours . . ."

" Never to fire a shot? But what—? "

Alan's voice grew louder. " She can't fire a shot," he said, " because the smoke of her own broadside might interfere with her view at a crucial moment. Anyone with a telescope, standing on the cliff near the Emperor's pavilion, can see the wrinkles in the face of *Medusa*'s captain. Conversely, anyone aboard *Medusa* can see the hands—*the hands*—of someone standing on the cliff.

" Yes! " said Alan. " I am wearing a conspicuous civilian costume, and I am to be on that cliff tomorrow. Using Dr. Braidwood's deaf-and-dumb alphabet, the alphabet you first taught me, I can send to an interpreter aboard *Medusa* the news of what Boney means to do."

" *Do you understand what you're doing?* " she cried. " The whole of the Boulogne Camp will be looking straight at you! If you make one false move, and they see it . . ."

" A far greater danger is that *Medusa* may not arrive in the morning, or even in the afternoon if there should be a dead calm. With three persons, Ida and Mercier and now Victor, who are bound to be discovered by forenoon at the latest—" Alan paused.

" Thousands of lives may be saved, and a European disaster averted, if only Austria and Russia can be warned in time that Boney is marching against them."

Alan smote his hand on the pommel of the sabre. " I tell you," he said, " when I thought Victor suspected the ship I should have rammed this sword through him. Even before that, I should have put Mercier out of the way for good. As soon as I saw those lights in the forest, I knew I was bound to leave the house tonight;

Mercier alive will always be a danger. I should have taken him unawares and stabbed him dead with Captain Cut-throat's dagger.

"But I couldn't do it, Madeleine. God help my weak guts, I couldn't do it! I can't kill any man except in a fair fight; and even then, I'm not at all sure of myself. I've got to warn you of that, no matter how weak it is or how much it lowers me in your eyes."

There was a silence.

"And you think," Madeleine said out of a full and overflowing heart, "you think it would be likely to lower you in my eyes?"

"I think you ought to know the truth, anyway. For some reason you've always exaggerated my courage. Now I *am* going, and all I can promise, my dear, is that I won't let you down if I can help it."

"Yes, go!" said Madeleine, with the tears stinging into her eyes. "Please go!" He tried to take her hand, but she pushed him away. "Go, my darling, before I make a complete fool of myself. But don't fail to come back, or it won't be worth living at all." She heard the quick rattle of his spurs descend the marble staircase, and presently die away.

Down the broad gravel driveway, between the line of statues on either side, the dapple-grey mare flew at the gallop.

She was a beauty, that horse. Alan found her ready saddled with Mercier's saddle and green saddle-cloth. From the first whisper and pat, in a deserted stable, they understood each other. She put back her ears; she responded to a touch or even a thought, without need of the spur. He immediately christened her Fancy Girl, after a favourite horse at home.

Despite the sheets of cold rain whirling into their eyes, he put Fancy Girl at the gallop down the gravel drive, where he would have first to pass the two sentries at the entrance-gates. He was wearing Mercier's busby, fronted with the metal letter *N* which marked it as the badge of the Mounted Guides. His flapping cavalry mantle covered his clothes. But there was a light on top of each stone gate-post; and every one of Boney's cavalrymen wore side-whiskers, or a moustache, or both. However, if he kept his head lowered and a corner of the mantle up as he whisked past . . .

At the thudding onrush of his approach, the two sentries of the Imperial Guard stopped their pacing and drew back to each side. Sodden with rain loomed their high bearskin caps; which, with the mingling of shaggy hair and bearskin, made their broad sunburnt faces seem to be all eyes and moustache. Up came their muskets to salute as he swept past.

Alan, remembering in time to return the salute palm-inward in French style, ducked his head before he swung Fancy Girl to the left. And the accursed busby all but toppled off.

Past dashed Fancy Girl, out onto the good-surfaced highway. Alan had a glimpse of the sentries' faces by pale, rain-blurred light. Grim faces, not young; one of them drawn as though with pain. Then they were swallowed up. Into turbulent darkness beyond the lamps, Alan dropped the reins and let the alert, human Fancy Girl

—sensing his mood, not greatly slowing—find her own way along the curve of the high road.

The rain soaked and blinded him as they moved southward, with the high stone wall of the Park of Statues curving away on the left. He should be safe enough now until he drew near the heavily guarded Field of the Balloons. Since couriers of the Guides were galloping everywhere tonight, he should be safe enough until . . .

Steady! With the busby jolting like a cumbersome powder-keg on his head, Alan shifted in the saddle and instinctively shortened rein. As they danced round the end of the park wall, into a long, straight stretch of road with poplar trees on either side, he saw more than the glimmer of a lantern which someone was holding up about a hundred yards ahead.

In the middle of the road, facing him, stood a heavy coach, drawn by two dispirited horses. Round it, against the smear of yellow coach-lamps, milled a half-disintegrated platoon of Oudinot's famous grenadiers. The yellow facings of their blue tunics were not yet altogether discoloured; they shielded their musket-locks under their armpits. The coachman on the box, in a three-cornered hat, waved a whip and shouted. But the most uproar was being caused by the platoon's officer, who held up his lantern at the coach-window and passionately addressed some person or persons inside.

At the thudding noise of Fancy Girl's hoofs, the officer swung round and held up the lantern.

"Hey!" he shouted to the approaching horseman, who drew rein just beyond a point where the light would have fallen on his clean-shaven face. "Hey, there! Do you speak any English?"

Alan Hepburn took one look at that coach, and guessed instantly who must be inside. It cannot be denied that his heart jumped up in his throat, but he had to make his decision.

"Yes, I speak some English!" he bellowed back. "What's the matter?"

"It's the lady and gentleman in this coach. They say they're Americans named Opple. At least, that's what I think they say. They don't speak a great deal of French. They may be goddams, for all I know. If you could—"

"Stand aside, all of you!" said Alan.

He could risk none of them seeing his clean-shaven face. Lowering his head, touching spurs, he drove Fancy Girl straight for the side of the coach. Turning sideways in the saddle, he thrust his head through the open window—cumbersome busby and all—and he was looking straight into a pair of eyes not twenty inches away.

Both side blinds of the coach had been drawn; only the centre glass was lowered. A reflector-lamp with its candle burnt against the wall. Facing him sat a wide-eyed young woman of perhaps twenty-eight, in a pelisse of claret-coloured velvet and a bonnet with upstanding red and orange plumes. She was small and pretty as a doll, having pink, dimpled cheeks with shining black eyes under well-marked, arched eyebrows, and a full, smiling mouth

above a round chin. But here, in a combination of demureness with vivacity, all resemblance to a doll ended.

Just beside and beyond her, astounded, sat a portly, handsome man, some fifteen years older. His tall beaver hat was pushed to the back of his head; a five-collared cape, like his neckcloth, had been disarranged as though by his own angry fingers. Open-mouthed, he also looked back at Alan while the rain drummed on the coach roof. Then Alan spoke.

" Mrs. Hopewell," he said in English, " your obedient servant. Mr. Hopewell, yours to command. Please don't speak! " Still the rain drummed.

" I shall not remind you," said Alan, " of any similarity in our political sympathies. But, in memory of the many bottles I have cracked with one of you," and he looked hard at Mr. Hopewell, " and the many anecdotes I have exchanged with the other," here he looked just as hard at Mrs. Hopewell, who coloured up like a peony, " I beg you to think of what I ask."

" Sir—" began Mr. Gideon Hopewell, in a bursting baritone.

But Alan rushed on. " When you meet my wife at the Park of Statues, as you soon will, I ask you to remember that she is a single lady named Miss Lenormand; and you never saw her before. Now say something, say anything, so that I can assure the officer you are the people you claim to be."

For a few seconds, Alan's heart stayed in his throat.

But, at mention of Madeleine's name, Mr. Hopewell's expression changed.

Whereupon Lucy Hopewell, in her best if halting accent from Miss Axminster's Academy outside Philadelphia, spoke very loudly in French for the benefit of the listening soldiers.

" And *your* name, my officer? " she cried.

" Captain Marius Legros," Alan said. Then, with intense significance: " *Don't you remember me from Paris?* "

Changing swiftly to English: " For heaven's sake say something! " he urged. " State your name and qualifications; protest about this as loudly as you can; kick up the devil's own row."

" Sir," retorted the angry Mr. Hopewell, " your objurgations, in this instance, are scarcely necessary. As the personal representative of President Jefferson, I protest that my wife and I have been stopped on the road no less than twice tonight. We have been obliged to take a completely roundabout course on our return from Ambleteuse. Finally, as the reason for our coachman's vociferations, something has gone wrong with the coach axle and we are unable to proceed at all. Considering all these circumstances, sir—"

With his head still inside the coach for shelter against betrayal, Alan called to the whole platoon.

" Soldiers! " he began, like a proclamation of the Emperor.

" Hey? "

" This American gentleman," said Alan, " is the personal representative of President Jefferson. Begin at once to repair the damage to this coach . . ."

A concerted yell of despair went up through the rain.

" We have just come from special and unnecessary sentry-go at the Field of the Balloons," thundered a tall grenadier, " being replaced by other poor bastards—sorry, lady-in-the-coach—being replaced, I say, by other poor devils of our own regiment. Can we stop now to repair a damned coach axle? "

" He's right, though! " snapped out the grenadier lieutenant. " Attention, you others, or you'll find yourselves in clink without benefit of tobacco. Attention! "

" Madame," said Alan, taking Mrs. Hopewell's hand and lifting it to his lips, " I cannot thank you enough for your generosity tonight."

Little Mrs. Hopewell, dimpling and smiling with effulgent delight, gave him a look from under lowered eyelids. " Generosity, Captain," she replied, " is a quality of which advantage may be taken in any number of ways. Do you return to the Park of Statues tonight? "

" I only conjecture so, Madame. Stand aside, grenadiers! "

Amid the outbreak of shouting and protesting, Alan snatched out his head and sent Fancy Girl forward into the dark. Some twenty yards away, beyond reach of lantern-light or coach-lamps, he wheeled round.

" Grenadiers! " he called back. " Is there any road to the Field of the Balloons which isn't completely flooded by the rain? "

" Aha," thundered back the tall grenadier, " if you turn left after you pass Condette on the right, and go up the road past the deserted forge, you'll get there well enough. But Captain Cut-throat's loose, my fine courier; they're firing at everything; and you know where you'll get a bullet, don't you? "

He stated, with relish, exactly where Alan would receive a bullet.

If there were any other way of entering the Forest of Boulogne, Alan thought as he let the horse carry him on blindly, he would not have come within miles of their balloon-enclosure.

But, in roaring darkness, there was no other way to find the road to St. Omer and Lille save by what lights—if any remained at all—would guide him towards the Field of the Balloons itself.

The narrow road up the hill, north-eastwards in what must certainly be the direction of the Forest of Boulogne, was little better than a quagmire. Not a pin-point of light showed anywhere ahead.

Time was crawling on; the watch ticked in his pocket. Thinking of Madeleine, alone at the Park of Statues with menace behind two locked doors, he felt jabbed and stung by the bayonets of haste when he could make no haste. To ride Fancy Girl up that hill was unwise, if not impossible. He must lead her, and with what speed he could manage. With relief he tore off the busby, hanging it by its chin-strap from the saddle-bow and shaking his neck free at last.

After a time, when the road seemed firmer, he mounted the horse

and rode. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes, twenty-five minutes, at least, to judge by the clock-beats in his brain. He carried a tinder-box, but he dared not strike a light.

A sudden flicker of lightning, kindling everything, brought him to a stop as though he had run straight into a wall.

He was *in* the Forest of Boulogne. He must have been in it for several minutes. No difference in the sound of the rain, nor any sharp scent of wet foliage or earth to warn so drenched a wayfarer. Everywhere tree-trunks towered up about him under the lift of lightning, while Fancy Girl picked her way along a path no more than eight to ten feet wide.

Alan slipped off the horse. Groping, he led her off the path and tethered her to a smaller tree-trunk. Since the cavalry mantle would only impede him, he took it off and draped it over the mare. He moved back in the direction of what he had determined to be the path. He must make sure.

Under the branches of the tall, ghostly trees, fewer drops of rain spattered on his outstretched palm. Wiping his hands on his coat, Alan took the tinder-box out of his pocket. It scratched sharply; an oil-soaked wick sputtered and curled up into flame . . .

And instantly the challenge lashed out. "*Who goes there?*"

With one movement Alan extinguished the flame and pitched straight forward, left hand holding his sword-scabbard to prevent it clanking as he flopped to earth, face down. At the same instant a second voice called out, beyond and behind the first. The beam of a dark lantern, its slide shot back, pierced out and wheeled high above Alan's head amid the trees.

"*Officer of the guard, idiot!*" snarled the second voice. "*Did you think it was ghosts or Captain Cut-throat? Can't you see my lantern?*"

"How do I know who you are? Advance, you! What's the word?"

"The word is 'Vienna.' Your reply?"

"'Danube.' But look here, my officer: I'll swear I saw a light in front of me, and somebody in a blue-and-yellow coat."

"And what the hell did you expect to see? Aren't they our own colours?"

"That may be. But I'd like to know," rose the aggrieved voice of the sentry, "why Charlot Oudinot's men, every bit as good as the Guard themselves, have to spend the night being nursemaids to a lot of balloons. We can't smoke, in case a spark touches the gas-bags. For all I know, we can't even lower our breeches and . . ."

"Listen to me, conscript," said the officer of the guard in a dangerous voice.

Alan also, pressed hard into the mud, listened with shaking nerves. The whole forest was alive with sentries. There must be one at every fifteen or twenty paces. Here, where Captain Cut-throat's first victim had been stabbed on the night of August 13th . . .

"Has it occurred to you, conscript, that we're not concerned with the balloons? We're here because two thirds of the artillery passed along the forest road tonight?"

"I *heard* that, yes. But what good are the guns against the goddams if they're hauling them in the other direction?"

"Fool!" said the officer of the guard. "We're not using them against the goddams. We're on our way to Vienna—"

Lightning whitened above the trees and a hammer of thunder smote out the rest of the words. But Alan needed to hear no more.

His reading of the Emperor's design was now as certain as anything could be, apart from a proclamation signed by Boney himself. But Boney could not move his whole mighty army for another five days at least. To gain this information even a few days beforehand, the men in the map-room at Whitehall would willingly give years of their lives. If he, Alan Hepburn, could send back such news by the frigate *Medusa* tomorrow . . .

And Alan, in the devilish excitement of hearing his reasoning confirmed, made his one foolish move. He sprang to his feet. Even then, amid the gloom and shadows of Boulogne Forest, it might not have mattered. The officer and this raw young sentry were still engrossed in their debate. The officer, for emphasis, was swinging round his open dark lantern.

Its thin yellow beam swayed behind him, darting through a screen of tree-trunks and touching dim shapes in a vast open space beyond the trees. It touched the wicker shapes of balloon-cars, moored on heavy ropes four feet above ground.

The wicker creaked and cracked, the ropes creaked and cracked, with troubled, ship-in-a-gale noises which Alan had mistaken for the sound of tree-boughs. Above them soared incredible goblin outlines—each oil-silk surface set apart from the others because it was inflated with highly inflammable hydrogen gas, each surface vividly painted in colours of green-and-gold—creaking with piercing notes, swaying, tugging amid wind and rain.

Then the officer of the guard swung back. "I tell you—" he began, and stopped . . .

What happened was the thousand-to-one chance. As both officer and recruit glanced round, the beam of the lantern whirled with them. It rested full on the muddy figure of Alan Hepburn, standing up and staring at the ground in front of him.

For there was a dead man lying almost at Alan's feet.

The dead man lay face downwards, against green-glimmering undergrowth, in his long overcoat. He looked as shrunken and inhuman as a sack, left hand out and musket at his right side. His tall hat of black-varnished leather, with yellow brush-plume in front, had fallen off and lay front upwards to expose the brass eagle. From his rain-sodden back upreared the polished black handle of the heavy dagger driven through his heart from behind.

The piece of paper, sticking to one edge of the blood and not yet rain-soaked, bore scrawled and familiar words. Alan could make out only a few. "If you want to know who I am, ask Fouché."

Then the frozen pause dissolved as both officer and sentry saw Alan. The pale-faced young sentry screamed, whipped the musket-stock to his shoulder and fired. The spurt of flame, the crash of the musket-shot, seemed to draw men from every tree and patch of undergrowth.

Alan saw lantern-light gleam on bayonet and polished gun-barrel. Sodden bark flew from the tree-trunk beside his left cheek. Something, with a hornet-like *burr*, hissed and then whirred deep into earth.

Alan's horse was only a dozen feet away. He leapt for Fancy Girl's bridle, caught one of his spurs in the tangled grass, and pitched headlong with a thud.

All this time the voice of the sentry, like a madman's, went shrilling up and up through Boulogne Forest.

"Captain Cut-throat! Disguised in one of our uniforms! He's here! He's here! He's here!"

The two things that happened, in ten succeeding seconds, balanced the scales equally between death and safety.

Alan, springing up, seized Fancy Girl's bridle, threw the cavalry mantle aside, and vaulted into the saddle.

At the same moment the officer of Oudinot's Grenadiers reached out and at one stroke cuffed the gibbering recruit into silence. Alan caught a glimpse of that officer, standing as cool as though on parade; Alan saw the long, hollowed face and eagle nose beneath the officer's varnished helmet with the brass decorations. He heard the officer's voice ring out with absolute authority.

"Listen to me, all pickets! Here is the officer of the guard speaking., Listen to me, all pickets!"

Dead silence. Alan, quivering, also sat motionless in the saddle and had just that time to decide his course.

"Cut-throat is here," said that measured voice, "within a dozen long paces of where I stand. He has a horse, and will try to ride south down the path out of the forest. Close in on that path. Those who have lanterns, open them wide and hook them over your arms. Fire at will, but do not obstruct each other. *At the charge-step, now! Vive l'Empereur!*"

In one vast crackling of brush and undergrowth, the forest erupted with lights and the long flash of bayonets. Oudinot's Grenadiers, who were shortly to win Austerlitz for their Emperor, swept in at the charge.

Alan threw the dice for his gamble.

Speaking to Fancy Girl, calling to her rather than using the spur, he whirled round the dapple-grey mare and drove her at the gallop along the path. But he did not ride south, as any sane man would have expected. He rode north-east—straight towards the Field of the Balloons and towards the centre of all his enemies.

So unexpected was the dash, and so thin the picket-line, despite its great length, that he had galloped through and beyond it before the men could wrench their bodies round to counter his move.

Three muskets exploded. High over him sang a thin scream; a lopped branch fell as a bullet severed it amid whirling lights. Abruptly, under Fancy Girl's flying hoofs, the spongy path opened out wide into the fifty-acre clearing of the Balloon Field.

Out from a mud-walled hut tumbled a tousle-headed drummer-boy, in his shirt, but with the big red-and-blue drum already slung from his shoulder. Its sticks whirled and fell in the furious spring-rattle call of the long roll for assembly.

More drums answered.

The roll swept in increasing tempo to a throbbing rattlety-bang across the whole field. Out of other huts plunged half-dressed men with muskets.

Alan put Fancy Girl at a harder gallop towards the nearest of the captive balloons.

Look out!

An engineer officer, with a pistol, loomed up before him and fired. Alan, whipping the sabre from his scabbard, did not even hear the shot as he fled past under the first balloon. His gamble would prove to be as insane as it first seemed unless something happened very soon, something for which he ached and prayed. There was just a chance—just a remote chance—that somebody would be too excited to hear or obey a certain sure order from the officers. "*Don't fire in the direction of those balloons! Don't fire!*"

But three grenadiers did.

The first explosion, which Alan heard high above his head as he rode hard under a canopy of green-and-gold shapes, like a nightmare forest in the rain, was a shattering boom and a vivid white flash of violet-edged light.

But it is not the explosion of hydrogen gas which need be feared when a musket-ball, nearly red-hot, stabs through an oil-silk envelope fully fifty feet in diameter. What must be feared is the surge of fire that follows.

Hardly had the boom and flash whacked out when a swathe of yellow flame soared up the whole side of the big balloon envelope nearest the south-western end of the forest. Momentarily, before being partly obscured in a gush of oily black smoke, that yellow glare lit the field to the smallest vein in a leaf or the dirt under someone's finger-nails.

Under the canopy of light, Alan saw a drummer-boy, petrified, his sticks half raised. He saw an engineer officer crouching, eyeballs glistening and speculative, before the officer ran forward.

Then *he* had to act. His game was to wheel Fancy Girl round in her tracks; to gallop back straight in his own path; and, under the confusion caused by the burning balloon, to ride through the picket-line and regain the southern road. Now he wondered whether he could do it.

He was scared stiff, scared as green as the balloon colours; his arms and legs went limp, and under him Fancy Girl shivered as he did. Burning flakes of oil-silk sailed high on a rain-stung wind.

Boom went another explosion, as a second balloon burst open and took fire.

The fiercely blazing envelope of the first balloon, loud with the crackle of burning ropes and cordage and wicker, had begun to topple and shrivel up; the huge, fiery wreckage was about to collapse. But every guard would sensibly have scattered out of its way; it was his only path out of a closed trap, and he must ride under the falling island if he hoped to get out at all.

What pulled him together, steadying his nerves, was the feeling, in his stubborn Scots soul, that no damned foreigners were going to frighten him into weakening under fire.

And so he drove his spurs into Fancy Girl's flanks, and rode straight towards that trembling mass in the sky.

In a blur they flashed past the stakes and ropes of a still-tethered, still-undamaged balloon, while he wondered if the mare's off fore-hoof might flick against a stake and send them both rolling. The glare of the burning balloon struck him blind, as its envelope of heat shrivelled the breath in his lungs. He closed his eyes, flinched, and lay forward across the horse's back as the wreckage toppled to smother him.

" Steady," he heard himself say. " Here it comes."

Fancy Girl, who had taken heart from his own surge of strength, was no longer afraid. He thought she would not make it in time. But she flew just beyond the outer edge of the flame-island, fifty feet across in its diameter, as it crashed and whoomed to earth amid a spurting geyser of sparks and a swirl of fiery particles.

The breath hurt in Alan's lungs. His eyeballs, as he lifted the lids, felt seared and scorched; he could smell the steam from his own wet coat, and a tiny burn hurt like a real wound on his cheek.

Fancy Girl's hind quarters had been stung with fire particles; she was dancing, tossing her head, pulling at the snaffle . . .

But there was not a soul ahead of them. Not a soul.

Rat-tat-tat clamoured the drums behind them, frenziedly beating the Fire-Call. There was a noise of voices and of running feet. The sky was still painted in shifting colours of yellow-red and oily black from the light of the second burning balloon. But grateful rain caressed his face in a green-and-black forest. There was enough light in the sky clearly to show Fancy Girl the path as she raced farther and farther south-westwards.

He was riding past the spot, now on his left hand, where the murdered grenadier lay in the undergrowth. Why that phrase in the note: *If you want to know who I am, ask Fouché?*

Fouché? Alan was still willing to take his oath the Minister of Police had nothing to do with these murders. In addition to the man's caution, the latest report to British espionage mentioned a prospective peerage for the ex-republican: the title of Duc d'Otrante. It was doubtful whether Fouché knew this himself; but—

Out of the gloom, from the left side of the forest path a loud voice struck at him. " Halt! " it cried. " Halt, there! "

Alan did not halt; the voice must have known he wouldn't.

Long ago Mercier's busby had bounced away and been lost from the saddle-bow; long ago he had lost his cavalry mantle. But he still held the drawn sabre, and swung it up.

"*Halt, Cut-throat!*"

No lanterns were needed. Alan's head and shoulders showed too clearly against the glare in the sky.

From the left of the path, beside a tree-trunk, he saw the first of the musket flashes. This shot gave no whistling noise of a wide miss. Like the first one fired at him by the nervous sentry, it came close enough to make him duck. Simultaneously, somebody else fired from the right of the path.

Both musket-balls seemed to have missed; Alan did not look behind. At the same time, it occurred to him, he must have bruised his right arm against an overhanging branch. It was not painful; it was as though someone with bony fingers had rolled and nipped the flesh of the arm in a sharp pinch.

He had no need to fear further shots for a moment; it would take the sharpshooters too long to reload. But it would take them very little time to rouse the rest of the grenadiers and bring the whole hornets' nest streaming down the hill after him.

For many minutes he had been in no state of mind to observe either lightning or thunder; but he noticed them now. Something —perhaps it was the boom of two more explosions—made him glance back over his shoulder.

Good lord, was the whole Field of the Balloons going up in a gush of flame because of one wrong shot and a high-sailing wind? The balloons had been set very far apart against just this possibility. But it *was* a possibility; they had always known it, even when they trained their would-be invaders in the use of a device called a parachute, invented at the end of the century.

Glancing again over his shoulder, he twisted so far round that he stumbled in the stirrup-leather.

Somebody was following him on a horse.

Somebody, riding down through open fields at much the same pace as himself, was following him with gloating intensity.

Against the burning sky and the rain was printed the outline of a high, moving busby. It was unmistakably a cavalryman's busby, though the horse seemed a post-horse and not the best in the world. Alan knew who it was. He had known who it was certain to be ever since he found that dead body, stabbed through the back. Alan had suspected Schneider must have been following their coach from Paris. But he had thought that Schneider had been stopped; that he was out of the way. He thought that the Cuirassiers had cut his comb last night in the Forest of Hardelot.

Last night when he risked putting his head out of the coach window for a quick look behind, he *thought* he had heard noises of trouble and the clash of steel. But he could not be sure. And now it was evident that Schneider—the indomitable Prussian, the best swordsman in the Grand Army—was following his enemy with a personal hatred and concentration that nothing could deflect.

Still looking back over his shoulder, as the lightning lifted and the thunder smashed hard, Alan saw not only his enemy. He saw Schneider bedaubed like a figure in a bad dream.

The man's busby had already been dark, and his boots were black. His cavalry mantle, tightly fastened about his neck but rising and falling in sodden weight to the gallop, was black, too. And, to make him invisible when he stabbed his latest victim, he had heavily smeared his face with soot.

The Cuirassiers had mauled him, true enough. One edge of the busby was shorn away by a sabre-cut. Schneider's right arm, as he held his drawn sword stiffly, had received some wound, whether light or severe. But it showed only the triumph of his bony jaw, the cold certainty of his own invincibility, as he swept down hard for the kill.

By God, thought Alan, in a sweetness of hatred, are we going to have this out at last?

He shifted his wet grasp on the hilt of his own sabre, and partly lifted. And a stab of pain, astonishing him, twisted up all the way from his elbow to his right forearm. The pain was so unexpected that he started to open his fingers, and just saved himself from dropping the blade. His whole right sleeve felt heavy and sticky and moving with what could only be blood.

That marksman, to the right of the forest road, had not missed, after all. The bone in his arm was not broken, or he could not have moved it; apparently no artery was severed, either. Yet before long, when he began to lose too much blood . . .

But Schneider was wounded too, and in his sword-arm; and it did not stop the unbeatable Schneider.

Nearer and nearer Alan was coming to the well-surfaced highway, on which he could turn towards the Park of Statues and the waiting Madeleine. He had a far better horse than Schneider's; he knew it.

And the two sides of his nature warred within him as they always did. "You promised to meet their champion on a fair field. Turn and fight, blast you! Turn and fight!"

That was one side. Back to him, with cool derision, came the other side. "Is your damned pride more important than sending the message by *Medusa* tomorrow? Forget Schneider and ride on!"

Alan rode on. He gained the high road and whispered to Fancy Girl for every ounce of her speed.

Save for the wetness of the road, there was no need to ride carefully. Behind him, north-eastwards and along the entire length of the ridge two miles away, the glare in the sky was so high and intense that its shimmer flickered through the poplar trees on the road here. The blaze had leapt out of all control. Fifty acres of balloons were afire, with their flames perhaps spreading to the surrounding woods as well. The alarm would have gone north to the Boulogne Camp by this time, rousing everybody.

Alan's arm throbbed with an intenser pain; it seemed to be

swelling up. With an effort he lifted the swaying sabre; he stabbed again and again, with angry concentration, to get its point into the slot of the scabbard; and he felt his body sway in the saddle, surprisingly, as the blade dropped home. What ailed him was increasing giddiness from loss of blood.

He tore past the village of Condette, where, on the left as you rode in this direction, a narrow lane led seawards towards the Inn of the Sleeping Cat. He passed the spot where Mr. and Mrs. Hopewell's coach had been stranded. Whatever repairs might have been necessary to the coach-axle, they must long ago have been completed by the platoon of grenadiers; the road lay empty and clear.

On Alan's right, towered up the wall which enclosed the Park of Statues. Its curve as yet hid the gates from his sight.

With added speed he rounded this curve. He had galloped into sight of the gate-posts, and the lights atop them under which two sentries should have been standing, before he suddenly remembered—too late—the absence of Mercier's busby and of the disguising cavalry mantle.

But that was not all he saw, as he drew rein and clattered to a halt.

The Hopewells' coach had again been stopped, this time facing the gate. It was still surrounded by a gesticulating platoon of men, of whom three or four had removed tunics and waistcoats. The officer was there, lantern in hand.

In front of the coach, with musket levelled and bearskin cap

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stark against the light, stood the burlier of the two sentries on duty. His white-gaitered legs were planted a little apart. The bayonet on the musket was pointed at Mr. Gideon Hopewell, in many-collared cape and beaver hat, who stood in front of him while Mrs. Hopewell leaned out of the coach window.

"Confound it!" Mr. Hopewell was roaring to the sentry, in English. "How many times are we to be stopped tonight? Don't you recognize me?"

Conscious that the sentry did not understand a word, he appealed to the officer.

"If you will ask this gentleman here . . ."

"Listen!" the sentry shouted to Mr. Hopewell in French. "I am Jules Dupont, a grenadier of the Imperial Guard, and I am carrying—"

"But—"

"—I am carrying a cursed knapsack over a broken collar-bone where I got a bullet from a damned Hussar officer. I don't say that to brag; I say it because I've been three and a half days in sick-bay, and I only took English leave from the hospital because there's a parade of veterans tomorrow. As Lieutenant Ravelle claims," and he jerked the bayonet towards the officer of Oudinot's Grenadiers, "you may have been staying at the Park of Statues for two days. But I can't identify you, and my pal is new to this beat. However—"

"If you will examine my credentials . . ."

"However!" roared Dupont of the Guard, "I have sent him to the house for someone who *can* identify you. If you will be patient, sir!"

Lieutenant Ravelle, the officer of Oudinot's Grenadiers, had caught the clatter of Fancy Girl's hoofs even after the sound had ceased, and had already swung round with lantern raised.

"Wait a minute!" he said. "Look ahead, there, down the road! I know that dapple-grey horse, don't I?"

And disaster, fine and full, smote Alan Hepburn just when he had believed himself well out of it. He was about forty feet beyond full reach of the lantern-light.

"That's the officer of the Guides, Captain Somebody, who knows these Americans personally. Hoy there, Captain! Ride forward!" Alan could not ride forward. The lights on top of the gate-posts, to say nothing of the coach-lamps and the officer's lantern, would disclose with deadly clarity a clean-shaven horseman in civilian's clothes.

Lieutenant Ravelle strode towards him, lifting up the lantern. "Hoy there, Captain!" he repeated impatiently. "I know who you are, right enough! What's the matter with you? Why don't you speak up?"

"Nom de dieu!" burst out a tall grenadier. "Will you look at the sky over the Field of the Balloons? It was bad enough a few minutes ago, but look at it now! Has some English spy been setting fire to the place?"

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"Spy?" echoed another. "You mean Captain Cut-throat?"

At the touch of that devilish name, by instinct and without knowing why, the men began to spread out across the road and look to the locks of their muskets.

"You know," cried a voice, "ever since that reward offer was posted, I've been dreaming . . . A hundred gold pieces and all the booze you can drink. I'd rather have that, almost, than sleep with Pauline Bonaparte."

Alan, breathing harder yet and with harsher effort, heard a new sound grow and gather along the road at his back.

It was the hoofbeats of Lieutenant Schneider's horse, always there with its rider as inexorable as fate, riding up to block his path in that direction, too.

Lieutenant Ravelle was striding closer with the lantern.

Alan knew he must act, and act at once. He tried to flog his tiring brain; he tried to think of something such as always, before this, had saved him. But he was held in a kind of paralysis. He was conscious of all things through a blur of dimming senses in the rain-misty light: of Mr. Hopewell turning round, of Mrs. Hopewell leaning out of the coach window, of the click of cocking flintlocks and of Oudinot's Grenadiers slowly raising their muskets to aim . . .

Lieutenant Ravelle, standing in front of him, swung up the lantern so that its glow illuminated his mud-smeared features and mud-black clothes. At the same moment, beyond its dazzle, Alan saw the other sentry of the Imperial Guard emerge from between the gate-posts. Madeleine was with the sentry, and he saw Madeleine's stricken face.

"You're no cavalryman!" shouted Lieutenant Ravelle. "Who are you?"

Round spun Alan on Fancy Girl, with the spell shattered at last, and drove in the spurs as he had used them under the burning balloon. Hardly had the mare settled herself to gallop in the other direction when Lieutenant Ravelle dropped flat in the road to avoid the bullets of his own men.

"Fire!" he said.

All that saved Alan from being shot to death was something the grenadiers should have foreseen themselves. Released from duty for so long a time, they had been too careless about guarding their musket-locks against damp. Ten triggers were pulled; only two gun-barrels fired a bullet at the retreating horseman. One bullet grazed the hind quarters of the dauntless Fancy Girl; the other struck and ricocheted with a wiry *whing* from the surface of the stone wall.

Along the road, round the curve of the park wall, Alan rode as hard towards the approaching Schneider as Fancy Girl could carry him. There was no dodging or avoiding Schneider now. Whether he liked it or not, he must face their best swordsman tonight.

There was something else, too, which he saw as he rode into the straight and caught sight of Schneider coming on towards him.

The pursuit of him was on the view-halloo from the Field of the

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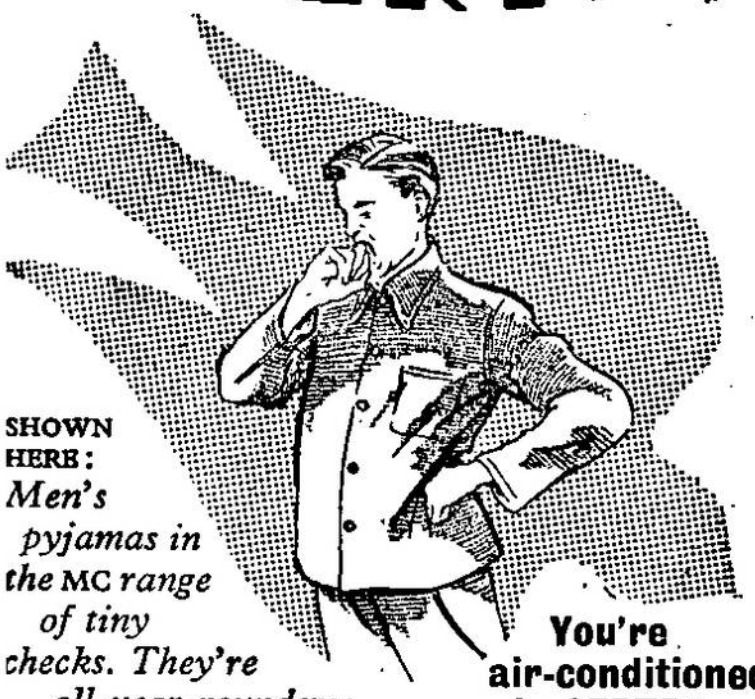

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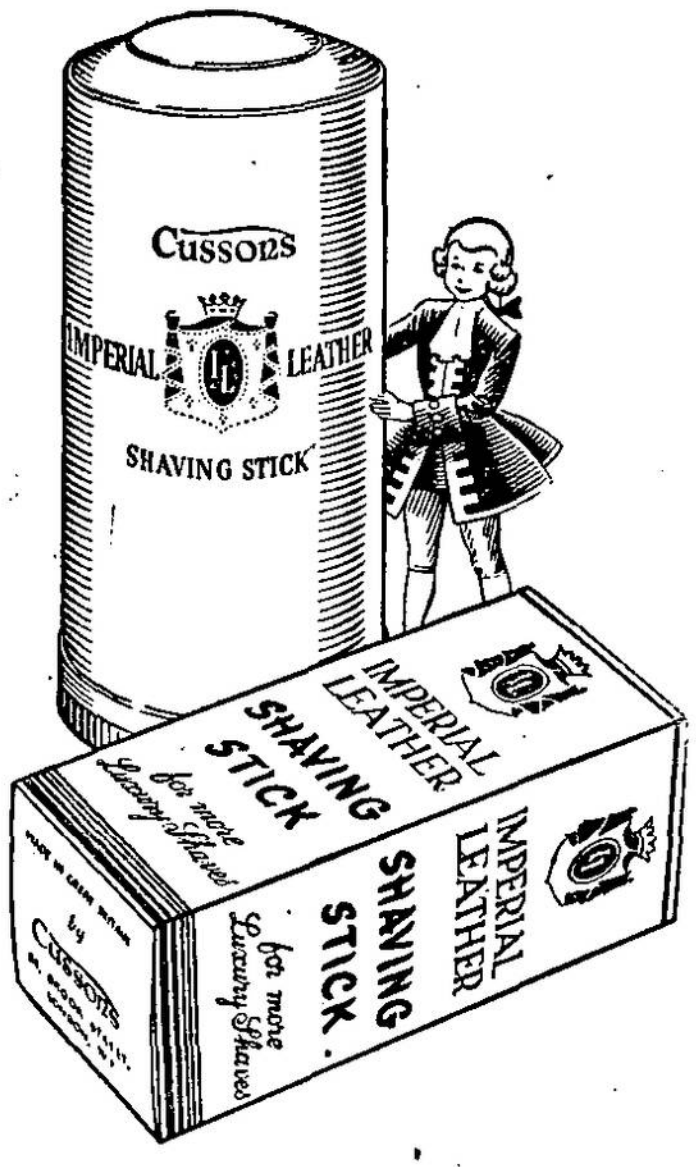

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Balloons. Though it was a long distance away, nobody could fail to make out that mass of men with weapons struggling down from the ridge under the eerily lit sky. There were horsemen with torches far in front of them.

Alan pulled up his horse. So did Schneider.

They were about a hundred yards apart: on a straight stretch of road, between tall and thin poplar trees, lighted like a subterranean cavern by the pink glare of the sky. The road's surface, ordinarily white, stretched away grey and greasy under the rain; its puddles glimmered pink, and swift water ran in the ditches on either side.

Patting Fancy Girl's neck, speaking to her with words he never afterwards remembered, Alan settled himself in the saddle and with an effort managed to draw the sabre from its scabbard.

Schneider stood between him and the side road which led to the Inn of the Sleeping Cat. So it was kill or be killed: if he could defeat Boney's champion and silence him, there would be just time to reach the inn before both sides of the pursuit converged on him.

Up there, a hundred yards ahead, Schneider also was settling himself. He was unbuckling the heavy cavalry mantle, throwing it off to get room for his sword-arm. An encounter like this was as much a test of horsemanship as of skill with the sword: one slip on that greasy surface, one miscalculation, and the chop or stab of your opponent's blade had finished you. Schneider, for some reason, did not appear to be so sure of himself on horseback . . .

They did not speak or call out; there was no need to do so.

At the same moment and with the same instinct, in hatred of each other and all the other stood for, they both set spur to charge.

Sabres back, tautened to jockey for position, they rode at each other under the burning sky.

★ ***The Fourth Part of "Black Sabre," by John Dickson Carr, appears in next month's Argosy on sale July 8.***

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A. R. Williams Esq., Comer Gardens, Worcester.

SOLUTION: Across. 1, *Cressida.* 5, *Blank.* 8, *Tadpole.* 9, *Atrophy.* 11, *Pro.* 12, *Le Roi s'Amuse.* 15, *At nothing.* 18, *Going home.* 22, *Extemporize.* 25, *Ore.* 26, *Promise.* 28, *In stock.* 29, *Easel.* 30, *Tent-pegs.*

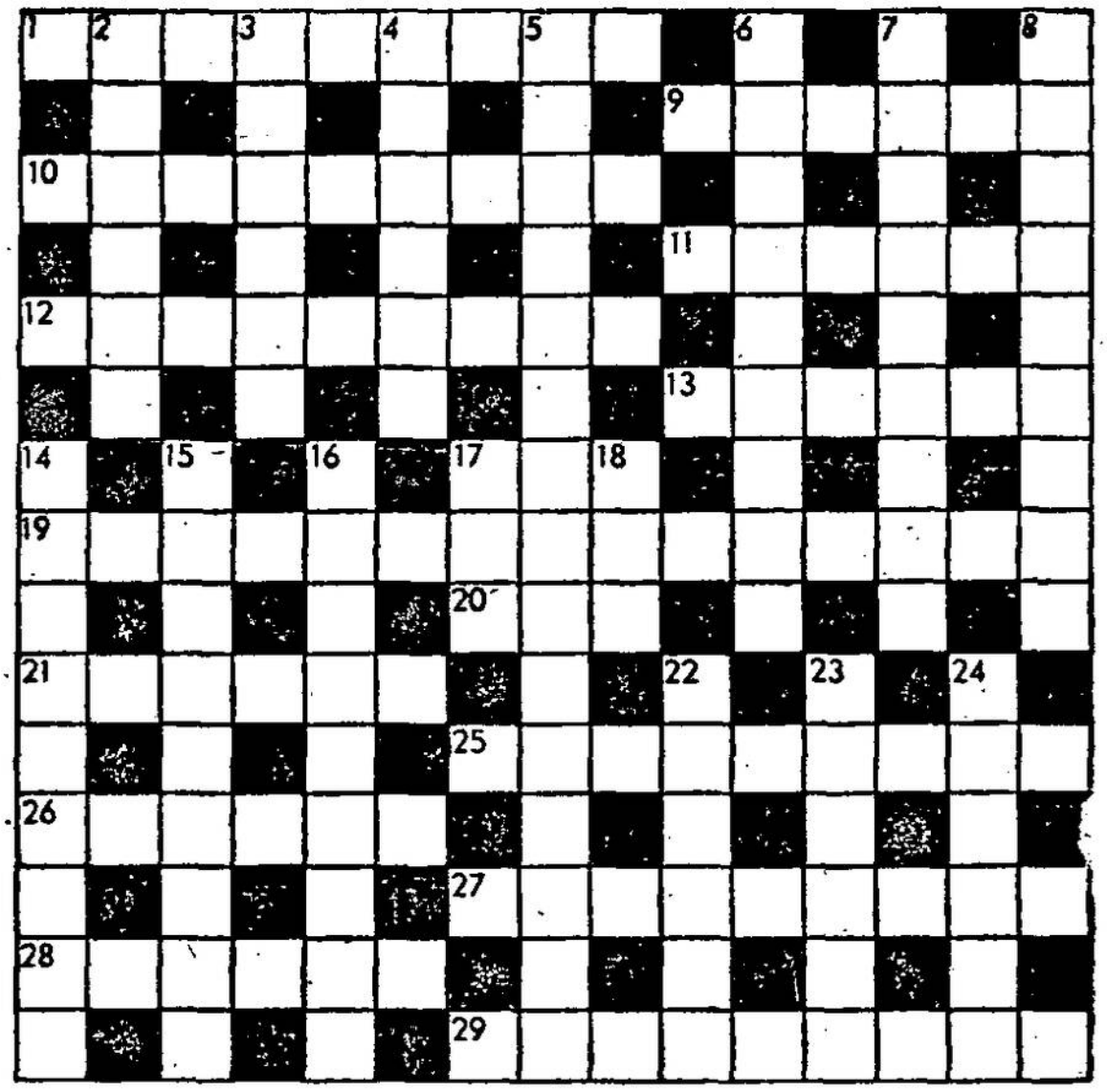
Down. 1, *Charleston.* 2, *Expert.* 3, *Silvia.* 4, *Alarm.* 5, *Bar.* 6, *Alph.* 7, *Kayak.* 10, *Toulon.* 11, *Pantomime.* 13, *Echo.* 14, *Inferences.* 16, *Ante.* 17, *Photos.* 19, *Cornet.* 20, *Tip-toe.* 21, *Ample.* 23, *Erect.* 24, *Moss.* 27, *Ill.*

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

★

Solution on Page 65

★



CLUES

Across

1 Make a slum pair more common in the Antipodes (9).

9 This poll looks ahead (6).

10 Not a watercourse, but it may make a dock rust ! (5, 4).

11 Artistic supporter of bridge ? (6).

12 Receives a hint and gets rich (5, 1, 3).

13 Some motorists no longer use this grip (6).

17 Singularly wild for play (3).

19 Time to show mercy to the team ? (7, 2, 6).

20 Equine fragment (3).

21 Instruments essential to forgery ? (6).

25 In the event of a call, I personally will answer (9).

26 Near bulls (6).

27 IXD (9).

28 May be the end of trains from the North (6).

29 Divide among religious party (9).

Down

2 Roam as fragrance (6).

3 " Our sometime——; now our queen " (Shakespeare) (6).

4 Hawking, not falconry is his pursuit (6).

5 Is this adjustment a daily necessity in the U.K. ? (15).

6 Comparisons that may show some latitude (9).

7 Mournful—like a litigant, perhaps (9).

8 Hang around her back (9).

14 Extra time may result from such a goal (9).

15 Upset, I cast in about fifty-five ! (9).

16 The housekeeper's store is evidently not full (5-4).

17 It has left a path (3).

18 A nip for a nipper (3).

22 Need this always be kept at arm's length? (6).

23 Things one shouldn't be down on (6).

24 Rice within has peaceful ends (6).

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